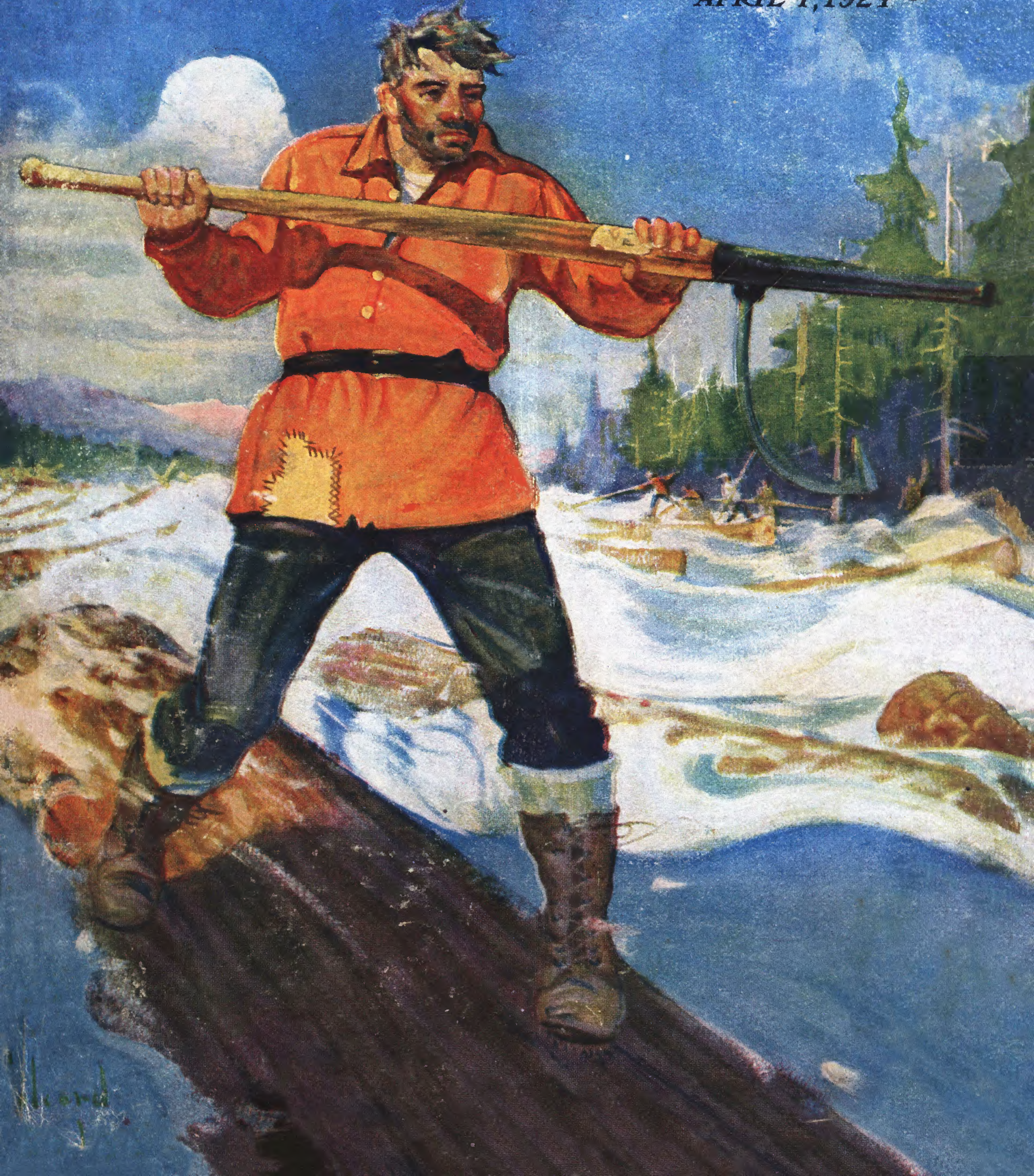
BRIGHT STORIES FOR WIDE-AWAKE READERS

TWICE-A-MONTH

15 CENTS

Top-Notch Magazine

APRIL 1, 1924



Get a Job Like These

Earn $3500 to $10,000 a Year



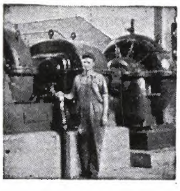
20 Years Old—Makes Almost $500 a Month

Harold Hastings of Somers, Mass., says: "The profit on my electrical business amounts to $475 a month. My success is due entirely to your instruction. You make your men just what you say—Electrical Experts. No man will ever make a mistake enrolling for your course."



Dickerson Gets $7,500 a Year

"I earned $30 a week when I started with you—$50 a week when half through your course. Now I clean up at the rate of $7,500 a year. Thank you a thousand times for what you did for me. Electricity pays big on the farm." Herbert M. Dickerson, Warrentown, Virginia.



$20.00 a Day for Schreck

"Use my name as a reference and depend on me as a booster. The biggest thing I ever did was answer your advertisement. I am averaging better than $500 a month from my own business now. I used to make $18.00 a week."

A. Schreck,
Phoenix, Ariz.



Pence Earns $9,000 a Year

W. E. Pence, Chehalis, Wash. says: "Your course put me where I am today, Mr. Cooke—making $750 a month doing automobile electrical work—think of it—$9,000 a year. Besides that I am my own boss. My wife joins me in thanking you for what you did for us."



$30 to $50 a Day for J. R. Morgan

"When I started on your course I was a carpenter's helper, earning around $5.00 a day. Now I make from $30 to $50 a day and am busy all the time. Use this letter if you want to—I stand behind it."

J. R. Morgan,
Delaware, Ohio.

in the Big Pay Field of ELECTRICITY

It's your own fault if you don't earn more. Blame yourself if you stick to your small pay job when I have made it so easy for you to earn $3500 to $10,000 a year as an electrical expert. **Electrical Experts** are badly needed. Thousands of men must be trained at once. One billion dollars a year is being spent for electrical expansion and everything is ready but the men. Will you answer the call of this big pay field? Will you get ready now for the big job I will help you get? The biggest money of your life is waiting for you.

I Will Train You at Home

I will train you just like I trained the five men whose pictures you see here. Just like I have trained thousands of other men—ordinary, everyday sort of fellows—pulling them out out of the depths of starvation wages into jobs that pay $12.00 to $30.00 a day. Electricity offers you more opportunities—bigger opportunities—than any other line and with my easily learned, spare time course, I can fit you for one of the biggest jobs in a few short months' time.

Quick and Easy to Learn

Don't let any doubt about your being able to do what these other men have done rob you of your just success. Pence and Morgan and these other fellows didn't have a thing on you when they started. You can easily duplicate their success. Age, lack of experience or lack of education makes no difference. Start just as you are and I will guarantee the result with a signed money back guarantee bond. If you are not 100% satisfied with my course it won't cost you a cent.

FREE—Electrical Working Outfit and Tools

In addition to giving my students free employment service and free consultation service, I give them also a complete working outfit. This includes tools, measuring instruments, material and a real electric motor—the finest beginners' outfit ever gotten together. You do practical work right from the start. After the first few lessons it enables you to make extra money every week doing odd electrical jobs in your spare time. Some students make as high as $25 to $35 a week in spare time work while learning. This outfit is all FREE.

Mail Coupon for FREE BOOK

—the Vital Facts of the Electrical Industry

The coupon below will bring you my big free electrical book—over 100 interesting pictures. The real dope about your opportunities in electricity—positive proof that you, too, can earn $3500 to $10,000 a year. Send for it now. Along with the book I will send you a sample lesson, a credit check allowing you a $45.50 reduction, my guarantee bond and particulars of the most wonderful pay-raising course in the world. Send the coupon now—this very second may be the turning point in your life. Send it while the desire for a better job and more money is upon you, to

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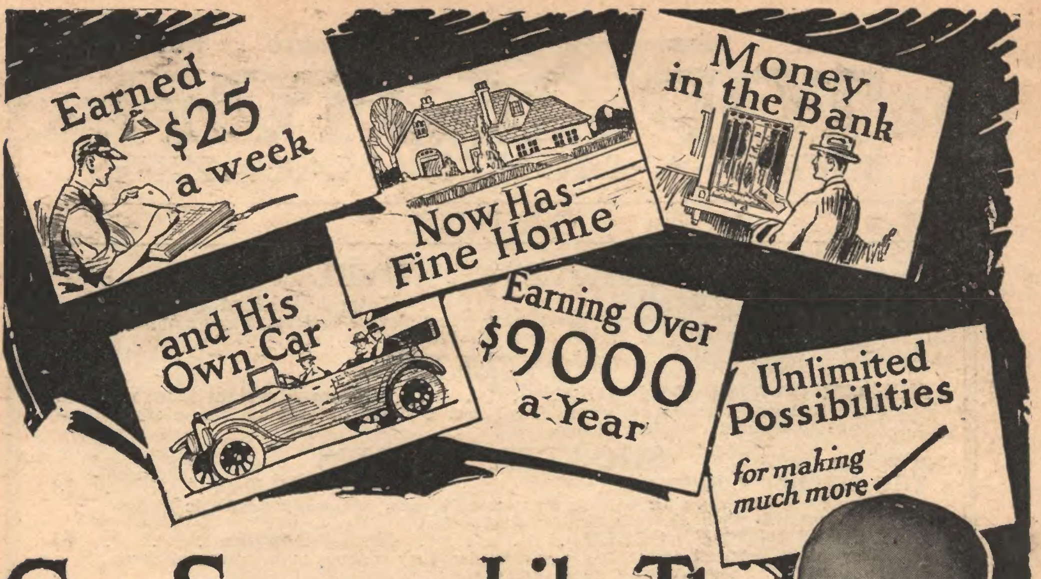
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Without obligating me in any way send me the "Vital Facts," your Free Book, Sample Lessons and particulars of your Free Outfit Offer, Free Employment Service, and proof that you can fit me for a big-pay electrical job.

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Address..

Occupation..





Can Success Like This Be An Accident?

"THE fellows who used to work with me while I was plugging along at $25 a week nre convinced that I either had a pull or just fell into a good thing—that my $9,000 a year position is a sheer accident.

"When I told them I had found nn easy way to earn big money as a salesman, they inughed at me and called it a harebrained idea. They told me 'salesmen are horn, not made.' But I decided to see my hnrebrained idea through. I was sick of slaving for a pittance.

"I started studying the secrets of master salesmanship as tnught by the Nationnl Salesmen's Training Association—and almost before I knew it I had confidence to tackle my first selling position. And why not? I had mastered the very secrets of selling used by the most successful salesmen.

"My earnings during the past month were $750. I now have hetter than a $9,000 a year position—with lots more room to grow. I can state positively that my sudden success was not an accident. It came because I knew how to sell scientifically. And how simple it is to sell when you know how. My regret is that I did not know these secrets ten years ago."—Ellis Sumner Cook, Manufacturers' Agent, 20 E. Jackson Blvd., Chicago, Ill.

Why Not Make More Money?

If you want to get out of the wage-earning class, if you want to make good money without loss of time—then do as Mr. Cook and thousands of others have done.

The secrets of salesmanship which Mr. Cook learned are available to you. There are certain ways to approach prospects, to stimulate interest, to overcome objections, and to close sales. Every move in selling is governed hy certain rules. Once you know these, success is yours.

Success Like This Yours

Adam Horneber, Bay City, Mich., writes: "I have increased my earning power 500% since I secured your training in the Science of Selling."

Lewis A. Tinnes, Minneapolis, Minn., writes: "When I finished your training I left my job at $160 a month and took a job as salesman. The first month I made over $600 and I expect to go higher yet."

N. D. Miller, 1705 S. Clark Street, Chicago, says: "I place the credit for my success where it rightfully belongs. I owe my present position wholly to the N. S. T. A. In July, 1919, I studied your selling secrets and in September you secured me the position which I now hold. I am earning in excess of $100 a week."

Bear in mind that these stories of real success—the kind that is nwaiting you in this field of unlimited money-making opportunities—are hut a few of thousands on file. You will find scores of them in our literature.

EMPLOYERS

are invited to write to the Employment Dept. of the N. S. T. A. We can put you in touch with just the men you need. No charge for this service to you or our members. Employers are also cordially invited to request details about the N. S. T. A. Group Plan of instruction for entire sales forces. Synopsis and charts sent without obligation.

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No matter what you may now think, it is only a thought. Get the facts! See for yourself how you can easily duplicate any of these stories of success. NOW and no other time is the minute to mail the coupon below. Our big free book, "Modern Salesmanship," will be mailed promptly. And there's no obligation.

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Age......................Occupation..............................

VOL. LVII APRIL 1, 1924 NUMBER 5

TOP-NOTCH

TWICE-A-MONTH MAGAZINE

CONTENTS

Twice-a-month publication issued by Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Ormond G. Smith, President; George C. Smith, Vice President and Treasurer; George C. Smith, Jr., Vice President; Ormond V. Gould, Secretary. Entered as Second-class Matter, January 8, 1915, at the Post Office, New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, $3.70. Foreign, $4.40.

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Published on 1st and 15th. Next Number Out April 15th



QUICK QUAKER—*cooks in 3 to 5 minutes*

Are you one of the wives or mothers who know you ***should*** serve oats often, but don't because of limited cooking time?

Quaker Oats experts have perfected a new Quaker Oates—Quick Quaker. So your grocer now has two styles of Quaker Oats. Quick Quaker cooks perfectly in half the time of coffee. Takes scarcely longer than simple toasted bread.

So start the day now with a hot breakfast—with Quaker Oats, the premier vigor breakfast of the world, steaming, flavory and enticing.

Quick Quaker is flaked from the same queen oats as regular Quakers Oats. The only difference is that the grains are cut before flaking, rolled very thin and partly cooked. And these small flakes cook faster.

That rich Quaker flavor is there. All the good of hot breakfasts ***quick.***

OATMEAL COOKIES

¾ cup shortening, 1 cup sugar, 2 eggs, ¾ cup chopped nuts, 3 cups rolled oats, 1 cup flour, 1 teaspoon salt, ¾ teaspoon mace, ¼ teaspoon cloves, ¾ teaspoon cinnamon, ¾ cup raisins, 3 teaspoons baking powder, 4 tablespoons candied citron, 4 tablespoons candied orange, 4 tablespoons candied lemon, ¼ cup milk. Cream shortening: add sugar and cream again. Add one egg at a time and cream thoroughly after each addition. Add fruits, nuts and raisins, then milk, and stir well. Sift flour, salt, spices and baking powder and mix well with rolled oats; fold into first mixture. Drop from spoon on cookie sheet. Bake in hot oven (400 degrees) for 15 minutes.

2 KINDS NOW

Ask for the kind of Quaker you prefer—Quick Quaker, or regular Quaker Oats. But be sure you get Quaker. Look for the picture of the Quaker on the package.

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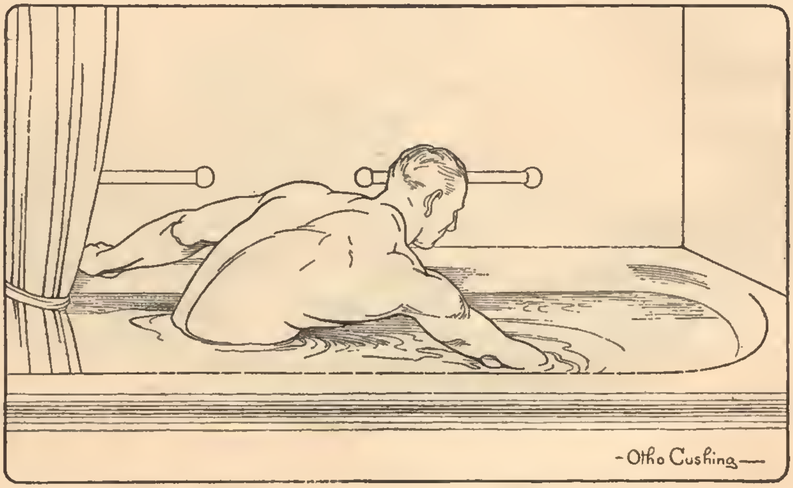
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TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE

Vol. LVII Published April 1, 1924 No. 5

Hatching a Volcano



By Roland Ashford Phillips

(A COMPLETE NOVEL)

CHAPTER I.

MOSTLY MINUS.

FROM where Andrew Brant sat on the comfortable bench shadowed by a huge Poinciana tree with its roof of flaming, scarlet blossoms, looking across the sapphire and jade-tinted waters of Havana Bay, the crumbling battlements of Morro Castle looked exactly like the picture post cards he had seen in New York. The riot of color in the sunset could not have been exaggerated. It was a prettier sunset and background than the best of the lithographer's art could command. It was a thing to call forth rhapsodies and produce a deluge of trite adjectives.

There was one very satisfying thing about the view—it cost nothing; and for that matter neither did the soft breeze that whispered among the palms and banana trees, nor the picturesque parade of the Havanese, afoot and in motor, that wound endlessly along the stone-flagged walks and Acacia-bordered Malecon.

Once the concert started, a trim, uniformed attendant with ferretlike eyes and *moustachios* black and waxen, would make the rounds and collect *cinco centavos* from those who preferred to listen to the music from the comfortable and uncrowded benches. And about that time Brant would have urgent business elsewhere and stroll beyond the reserved section.

Cinco centavos would purchase a fairly satisfying cigar, provided one knew where to shop and how to bargain. Tobacco was more essential, more comforting, to a lean stomach than the outpouring of music, however good it might be for the soul.

From the fact that Brant studiously avoided paying a seat tax, which was no more than the price of a subway ticket in New York, used discretion in the purchase of his cigar, and appreciated the beauties of nature because they were compli-

mentary, it is not difficult to surmise that he was, temporarily at least, impoverished in pocket.

Brant was in the springtime of his twenties, robust, American, not unhandsome, presentably garbed, and forever optimistic. Optimism was a quality that seldom deserted him. There were times when it might have been better defined as foolhardy, or again as recklessness; but at all odds it was the relish that added spice to the roast beef of life.

According to the fiction-writer's primer, a politician is forever crooked, a bootlegger rich, a millionaire grasping, and a knight of the buskin lamentably poor. Brant, actor, was not the exception to the rule, proving beyond all argument that a Thespian does not worry about his income tax.

Being of the show-shop clan, he yearned to set foot again in the Vertical City, made popular by brownstone fronts, hall bedrooms, and white lights, where agents could be stalked, engagements ambushed, and contracts snared.

Brant could not walk back to the mummer's Mecca, however sturdy his shoe leather, for a matter of seventy miles of shimmering, blue-green, shark-infested water intervened between the brilliant, stone-flagged Malecon and Key West.

Take it from J. Francis Snell, head of the organization that sailed away from the bleak sky line of Gotham, and in due time landed at the metropolis of the peppery little island with his aggregation of artists, "These Cubans don't appreciate a good, snappy vaudeville show!"

The Snell galaxy of stars twinkled more or less radiantly under canvas, thereby saving house rent; but even that novelty failed to attract. Presumably a tent indicated a circus, and the box-office patrons in the outlying sections insisted upon a menagerie, glittering ladies mounted upon cavorting steeds, trick elephants, and boisterous clowns. Not finding them they put the Cuban blight upon the show.

So Snell and his artists—with one exception—left the wreckage and sailed on a fruit liner for New York, thankful that return passage had been engaged and paid for long in advance.

The exception was Brant. The night before the scheduled sailing, the engagementless Thespian, enjoying a stroll in the vicinity of the *Parque Central* and lending an appreciative ear to the concert, stepped across a narrow, dark alleyway and thought for an instant that the whole of *La Belle Habana* had gone up in a gory blaze of fireworks.

When he awoke, some time before dawn, he found himself alone in a dirty little room with barred windows that looked out across a stretch of moonlit water. Voices reached his ear—a garble of Spanish, English, and ever and again an excited chatter that reminded him of a Chinese laundryman arguing with a patron who had lost his ticket. Shadowy forms slipped along. Presently a boat without lights—a trim, sleek, and silent craft—crept past the window and headed for the open Caribbean.

Brant viewed the scene upon the moonlit stage with a whirling brain and aching head. He realized dimly what had happened to him, but at the moment felt too weak and faint and indifferent to lift his voice. Just why he had been slugged and imprisoned were matters yet to be learned.

With his face pressed against the bars, Brant saw two men emerge from the shadows beyond. They passed below his window, talking volubly and loudly.

"A dozen monkeys gone!" one of the men declared. "Hope Korry gets through all right."

"Oh, he'll get through one way or another," the other responded. "The revenue cutter'll never be able to follow him; and he'll hide back in the shallow water if he's chased. Trust Korry to outwit them fool government guys."

"I'd 'a' waited over a couple of nights." The first man was speaking again. "The cutter's reported to be laying for him. There's some leaks on this end that ought to be plugged. The revenuers are gettin' too much inside dope."

"Huh, between them and the hijackers this monkey runnin' is gettin' risky. Well, it ain't none of our affair," the other man went on. "I'm willin' to take a little less and work on this end of the line."

The men passed on beyond earshot. Brant was about to shout to them, to demand his instant release, but thought better of it. If they were responsible for his present predicament, they might take

unkindly to the fact that he was awake, that he had viewed certain developments and overheard remarks.

Brant was in no mood or condition to bring about a second encounter. The conversation he had listened to seemed without meaning to his muddled brain. Fifteen monkeys! Revenue cutter! He couldn't connect the two. The mention of a revenue cutter brought to mind smuggling; and no doubt something of that nature was afoot. But monkeys! Surely they were not contraband.

All sounds beyond his window died away. The peaceful calm of a tropical night succeeded the busy and mysterious scene of a moment before.

After a period given over to deliberate reflection, Brant felt his way along the wall of the room, seeking some means of escape. He found a door at last, but it was locked. The effort he made in tugging at the knob was too much for him. He felt sick and weak, and presently he wilted, toppling across a cot. It was softer than the stone floor. He stretched out upon it and closed his eyes.

It was broad daylight when he again awoke and took notice of things about him. The hot sun streamed through the barred window and painted vertical lines on the opposite wall. Brant rolled off the cot and made for the door. This time, much to his surprise, it opened readily, and he stepped out into a wide patio.

He glared defiantly and rather amazedly about him. No one was within sight. The patio was empty; the doors that opened from it were closed. He had a debt to pay and meant to return it with interest. Just at the moment he felt in a mood for fighting; but there was no one to give battle; no one to answer questions. It was a strange, unaccountable state of affairs, he reasoned when, after surveying the scene, he passed through an unlocked gate into a side street that ran along the water front.

His clothes, once clean and immaculate, were torn and soiled. His hat was missing, and there was a very tender, bruised spot on the back of his head—the fuse that had set off the fireworks of the night before.

It was not until he had gone through his pockets and found them plucked clean, that one of the mysteries was solved. Robbery had been the motive for the attack upon him; but why his assailants had taken the trouble to lock him in a room afterward and later permit him to walk away unchallenged were matters to arouse speculation.

A diminutive Cuban policeman, with a revolver strapped about his waist, strolled around the corner and glanced suspiciously at Brant; but at that moment, on the point of relating his troubles, the former member of the Snell organization glanced seaward and relieved himself of certain sulphuric remarks that may, or may not, have shocked the minion of the law.

Slipping past Morro Castle, gleaming white in the morning sun, a big fruit liner plowed majestically through the amethyst bay, her high bow pointed toward New York. Dismally, Brant watched it; he almost fancied he could make out the forms of his player companions lining the rails.

With a shrug, ignoring the officer, Brant plodded along the street, his mind filled with varied emotions. By the time he reached the modest *la casa de huespedes* where he had lodgings, and explained the circumstances of the past night to a sympathetic *el patrona* and changed into clean clothes, Brant was in better spirits.

He seldom cried over hard luck, for such was the familiar bugaboo of all mountebanks. His twelve dollars were gone, along with his steamer ticket. But other dollars could be garnered, and other steamers would be sailing.

A few hours later he had talked himself into an engagement. Doing cabaret work, even in the smartest of Havana restaurants, was distinctly out of his line; but the modest remuneration supplied him with food, and the novelty of the work furnished amusement as well as diversion.

CHAPTER II.

PLAYING HIDE AND SEEK.

KNOWN as "Jud" to his associates, and as a resourceful, daring, and altogether slippery quarry to the Federal agents along the Florida coast, Captain Korry headed his nameless, forty-footer

into the shimmering Gulf. The powerful engines below deck purred rythmically, the sharp bow plowed through the water and left a bubbling pearl and green whirlpool streaked with phosphorescence in the wake of the boat.

Contrary to maritime rules, no lights were showing, except a tiny, shaded one over the compass; but the stars were bright, the air clear, and the water as quiet as a pond.

Korry was a man of middle age, picturesque, muscular, with brutelike shoulders and head, and with the parched, leathery complexion of one baked in the oven of the tropics. Born of a Spanish mother and "Conch" father, a tiny, palm-fringed key had been his birthplace. He never had been farther north than Jacksonville—and always by boat. The mainland—traveling afoot or on wheels—never attracted him.

His ragged, black mustache and unshaven cheeks gave him a decided piratical look; and his deep-set, sinister eyes glowed with all the reputed villainy of a Captain Kidd or Bluebeard.

He was, in no small way, an offspring of the buccaneers although history has failed to record it. His father and grandparent before him had been "wreckers" along the uncharted reefs between the mainland and Key West, luring vessels ashore by false beacons, consigning the remnant crews to the depths, and dividing the spoils.

Although the cargo of Korry's craft contained neither pieces of eight nor precious stones, it was none the less valuable, and the risks he ran were great. No skipper of a pirate ship was kept more on the alert; none more keen to realize the dangers that constantly threatened him.

At regular intervals, the single member of his crew, Meech, making his first trip out of Havana as a combination engineer, mate, and general utility man, came upon deck for a breath of fresh air and a drag at a cigarette. He was, in appearance, as forbidding as his skipper, whose capable hands controlled the wheel.

Meech was undersized compared with Korry; his cheeks were hollow, his cheek bones and nose prominent. His thin lips twisted at an ugly slant when he spoke. East Side New York had known him a few months before, and the police along the river front had his record—an unsavory one. Their sudden activities, along with evidence left behind, had forced Meech to spend a vacation in the tropics.

He knew what he was up against when he shipped with Korry; but he had been in the habit of taking chances—and a great many other things—when the remuneration was alluring. Besides, Cuba had its attractions, and a thirsty man could drink in the open. Meech had spent the best part of his career as nursemaid to highspeed marine engines, and keeping them in good behavior had more than once kept him out of danger. That was why Korry signed him on and paid him five dollars for every hour out of Havana port. Speed was often priceless; and there were times when a balky engine would have meant disaster.

Meech came up on deck an hour after the boat had left the harbor. By that time the amber glow in the sky from the lights of the Malecon was far astern. He came up to where Korry sat before the wheel and busied himself with the rolling of a cigarette.

"How're the monkeys?" Korry asked.

"Haven't heard a peep out of 'em," the engineer responded. "If it keeps as smooth as this," he added, referring to the weather and water, "guess none of 'em will get sick."

"The weather'll hold all right," the skipper asserted with a confidence born of long experience. "I'm not worried about the monkeys getting sick, if your engines don't."

"Huh, they're runnin' sweet. Doin' twenty right now, ain't they? And we ain't crowded 'em a bit. You sure got a neat piece of machinery below."

Korry grunted. "What did you expect to find?" he retorted contemptuously. "One of them rowboat kickers you pack in a grip? We can show our heels to anything in these waters. Maybe we'll demonstrate before the trip's over. The revenue cutter's ahead of us somewhere."

Meech grinned. "Suits me! I ain't had enough excitement in the last month to keep my blood from stagnatin'."

"What did you do with that bird you rapped to-night?"

"Packed him down to the warehouse and dumped him in. Afraid to leave him in the alley, 'cause a cop showed up. Knew if I'd run he'd be after me. So I told him the guy was drunk."

Meech chuckled reminiscently. He did not take the trouble to inform his employer about the wallet he had deftly extracted from his victim's pocket. Korry might not condone such practices. Meech had taken the twelve dollars. The wallet he had retained for personal use; and the steamship ticket it held might be disposed of at a discount to some unsuspecting stranger. All was grist that came to his mill.

"Did the cop follow you?" Korry demanded sharply.

"Naw! One of the other boys come along, and we packed the dreamin' bird out of danger. He didn't wake up either. Maybe I croaked him; don't know. Dumped him in the warehouse and locked the door. Told Carter to unlock the place before mornin'. If the man's able to get out he won't find anybody around to answer questions."

"Don't be so quick with your rapping after this," Korry admonished. "Likely to get us in wrong with the Spiggoty authorities."

The skipper took pains to keep in good standing with the Cuban police. He wanted no trouble on that end of his route; there was enough to contend with between Morro Castle and the Florida Keys.

"But he was spottin' for the hijackers, boss," the other declared, prompt to defend his actions. "He was followin' me. If he'd seen us puttin' off to-night he'd wire his pals up the coast to put the screws on us."

Korry shrugged, apparently but half convinced. The hijackers had troubled him in the past and doubtless would in the future; but they wouldn't catch him napping. "I'm heading for a new landing this time," he said. "Got a shore agent on the ground who'll keep his eyes open."

The next time Meech came on deck Korry gave him the wheel. "Hold her on the course. I'm going down to inspect the cargo."

After stretching himself leisurely, the skipper descended the steep companionway ladder, unlocked the door of the after cabin and stepped inside to inspect the twelve Chinamen—known to the trade as "monkeys" or "pieces of silk"—who, docile and sheeplike, were huddled in the narrow room.

The cabin was stifling hot and thick with cigarette smoke, although as a rule smoking was forbidden. Korry permitted it on most occasions because it kept his sweating, human cargo in a better mood. But in spite of the tobacco smoke, the cabin reeked with an indescribable odor.

The Chinamen were dressed in American store clothes, even to hats and shoes, starched collars and cravats. The smuggling tong in Havana supplied the outfit gratis as part of its bargain to deliver their contraband safely. Everything except a few personal belongings had been taken from the dragon worshipers before embarking. The aliens were separated from any scrap of paper or souvenir which could, in case of later and unforeseen difficulties, connect them with a smuggling transaction.

Immigration officials, constantly on the alert to frustrate the subrosa influx of Celestials, were trained to recognize the symptoms of "greenness" in the newly smuggled aliens.

Korry scrutinized each of the Chinamen in turn with an eye that searched for flaws. He was a critical stage director that inspected his supernumeraries narrowly before permitting them to go upon a scene. Those with suits too large were ordered to exchange with companions whose attire fitted too snugly.

All things considered, the men looked fairly presentable. At a glance they might have been taken as a group of more fortunate brethren gathered in the streets or shops of any American Chinatown. Whether they felt as comfortable in their new clothes as they had, a few hours before, somewhere below Marianao, in muslin jumpers, native hats, and slippers, was a question. But Korry did not permit that to concern him. Appearances were what he was after.

Two hundred dollars a head was the stipulated price per passenger—half down when the cargo came aboard at the Havana rendezvous, the balance when it was put ashore on the Florida coast.

Korry and his speedboat represented the next-to-last jump in the long pilgrimage between the Far East and the multitude of cities in the United States—a distance of a hundred miles, sometimes less, frequently more.

By what method and manner the yellow men reached Cuba—the storehouse for the powerful smuggling tong—Korry did not concern himself; nor did he speculate upon the dangers they ran on the final lap ashore, once they had been safely deposited on Florida soil and the receipt for them rested in his pocket.

Although two sources of danger threatened Korry's life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, he had nothing but profound contempt for the handful of immigration officers and the revenue patrols. What he feared most of all were the breed of cunning, unscrupulous jackals known in the trade as "hijackers," freelance bad men, who were on the alert to stage surprise parties at the most inopportune times.

The successful hijacker, getting wind of a certain job, was in the habit of appearing on the scene at a critical moment, either when a cargo was being taken aboard or discharged, holding up the chink runner under threat of exposure, or bodily harm, and collecting an unofficial share of the booty.

They prospered in the heyday of rum, dope, and chink running; but as a rule they did not attain old age. As a representative of the new and honored pursuit of furnishing labor for Chinese laundries and cooks for chop-suey parlors, to say nothing of domestic help for Anglo-Saxon households, Korry had put the graveyard sign on several hijackers himself.

One of the Chinamen of his cargo could understand and speak a bit of English, and it was through him that Korry delivered orders. The skipper had been transporting the yellow men for three years, but had picked up little of the language. It wasn't worth the time and trouble. Usually he made himself understood by signs.

His inspection completed, Korry relocked the cabin door, taking no chances of an inquisitive passenger showing himself on deck, mounted the ladder and relieved Meech at the wheel.

Presently Meech betook himself between decks to attend his engines. Hour by hour they had performed without a miss or splutter. Meech, with more than ordinary pride, tinkered with them, pampered them with oil, adjusted the feeds, and listened for distress symptoms.

Hour after hour Korry squatted on a camp stool before the wheel, keeping the bows in line with his needle—a silent, grim figure.

A pin point of light flashed on and off—the first of the lighthouses along the keys. Korry changed his course slightly, but did not check the throbbing motors. Better than twenty knots they were doing. Dawn must find them deep among the inlets and friendly lagoons that surround the thousand nameless, barren islands fringing the Florida coast.

The first streaks of pearl and coral in the east found them within a few miles of the dreary, palm-dotted shores; also it found Korry with binoculars riveted to his eyes, getting an introduction to a suspicious-looking craft that had appeared suddenly from behind an island.

A few minutes later, when the skipper lowered his glasses, Meech appeared on deck. A quick glance astern gave him an inkling of trouble.

"Yes; it's the cutter," Korry confirmed in answer to the man's startled query. "I was expecting it, but hoped she wouldn't turn up so soon."

"She isn't gaining any," Meech remarked, after a prolonged scrutiny.

"Not likely to, either," the skipper responded, apparently undisturbed. "I could leave her a dozen miles astern in another hour if I'd a mind to; but that isn't necessary. We'll duck in around the next point and play a little hide and seek. We're drawing three feet of water to the cutter's six. Nothing to it!"

CHAPTER III.

OUTSIDE THE LAW.

THE skipper knew the particular waters through which he adroitly steered as well as the native fishermen, upon whose homesteaded keys they had been born and raised. In his unprosperous days Korry had been one of them. He had piloted the first of the government sur-

veyors into the vast uncharted region. Every sand bar, cluttered bayou, and treacherous channel had been his playground. Day and night he could take his shallow-draft launch among the coral reefs and lead the floundering Federal cutter a merry chase through tide run and lagoon, or take safe shelter behind a hundred mangrove-covered islands.

In the next half hour, cut down to quarter speed and obedient to the firm hand on the tiller, the boat was winding quietly through placid waters amid a bewildering maze of green-clad islands. The cutter dared not follow. In all probability it was cruising up and down outside in the Gulf, waiting like a cat at a rat hole for the smuggler to show himself.

"Anywhere near your landing place?" Meech asked when two bells sounded from the forward cabin.

"Not yet." Korry scowled and spun the wheel quickly, at the same time speeding up the engines. The boat rocked, and its keel scraped upon a bar. Presently they were in deeper water again, and the skipper looked relieved.

"Close shave there!" exclaimed Meech, frowning. "Don't seem to be enough water to float a chip."

"Tide's almost dead low," Korry grumbled. "Should have figured that. Ought to have stayed outside another mile before heading in," he admitted, his tone less optimistic.

The water was clear. The dazzling white bottom could be seen on every side. The channel through which they passed did not seem inches deep; but it was deceiving. The boat crept along.

Presently another bar loomed ahead—a long spit of sand over which an army of fiddler crabs played. Korry avoided it neatly, only to break into a stream of imprecations a second later when the boat grated harshly upon an unseen and unexpected oyster bed. He reversed the screws in an effort to back off. The water boiled under the stern, and the launch twisted and squirmed and shuddered like a harpooned shark; but it refused to move backward.

Three times Korry repeated the performance, his countenance black with wrath, his vitriolic language smothered by the roar of the laboring engines. At last he shut off the gas and glared at Meech as though holding his crew responsible for the disaster.

"Fast aground, are we?" Meech ventured.

"Looks that way, don't it?" Korry retorted with a savageness that awed the engineer-mate. "Tide's lower than I've ever seen it before. Of all the blasted luck!"

Meech gazed speculatively about him. "Safe enough here, aren't we? The cutter can't get in; and when the tide rises, we'll——"

"No; the cutter can't get in," Korry came back, cutting short the other's optimistic assertion; "but she can spot us through that channel off our bow. We're less than a mile from the Gulf. And half an hour after they sight us, knowing we're aground, there'll be a small boat coming after us."

Meech scowled. "I hadn't thought of that," he admitted, squinting along the narrow channel that led to open water. "We're right in plain sight, ain't we?"

"Plain as if we were in the open," Korry declared.

"Maybe the cutter won't get up this far," Meech argued hopefully. "Chances are we'll get off before——"

"Not a chance in the world!" the skipper broke in. "Them Federal birds know most of the channels, even if they can't get far in. Tide won't turn for six hours. Before then——" Korry stopped with an imprecation and reached for his glasses, training them upon the channel.

Meech's eyes followed. A boat showed far off at the mouth of the channel; a moment later it had vanished.

"That's her!" Korry snapped. "Ten to one they've spotted us."

The men waited expectantly. In a few minutes the cutter, returning, was in sight again, moving slowly and bearing closer to shore. Korry continued to level his glasses upon the craft.

"Told you so!" he exclaimed. "They're putting over the small boat. A dozen men filling it."

"How long'll it take 'em to reach us?" Meech inquired, beginning to exhibit signs of apprehension.

"Half an hour. The tide's running against them."

Korry, breathing hard, looked about him. Meech waited, wondering what would be his skipper's next move. Something had to be done—and inside the next thirty minutes.

After a moment of deliberation, Korry turned upon his crew. "Got to get rid of our cargo!" he declared. "We're trapped. Stir yourself, Meech! No time to waste now."

"You mean you'll put the chinks ashore?"

"That's it. Do you suppose I'd wait to have 'em found on board? Got any idea what you'd be up against if our cargo was found? Just five thousand fine and five years in jail for each monkey, that's all. We've twelve aboard. That's sixty thousand dollars and sixty years behind bars. Does it listen good to you?"

"But can you get the chinks off?" Meech inquired. "They're likely to raise a holler and——"

"A smuggled chink never hollers; he knows it isn't healthy. Besides, he always follows orders. I'll make 'em think this is the regular landing place," Korry went on with an evil smile. "They'll be glad enough to wade ashore and hit the tall timber when I hand 'em a few remarks."

"What's over there?" Meech asked, nodding toward the nearest land from which the sand bar extended.

"An island. Most of it under water at high tide; but it'll answer the purpose. A couple of miles wide at this point."

"You'll come back after 'em later on?"

"Maybe so; maybe not. It all depends. That cutter knows we've got a parcel of chinks aboard; but they won't find any of 'em in half an hour. Of course they'll suspect we've landed 'em somewhere, but somewhere isn't very definite, and it would take the whole standing army a year to comb over these islands."

The bow of the launch was in plain sight from the channel, and doubtless under constant surveillance; but the stern was concealed by the tangle of mangroves. It was over the stern that Korry, after a short palaver with the English-speaking Chinaman, led the docile cargo.

The water was shallow, and in single file, after removing their shoes and rolling up their trousers, the Chinamen splashed along to the sand bar and from there gained the higher ground. Meech brought up the rear, nervously fingering a revolver that rested in his coat pocket. He never had any love for his charges. The odds were twelve to two, if the cargo suspected the truth. The thought of that prospect was not inviting.

It was under the rusty coconut palms that Korry, who had led the way ashore, delivered his final instructions. He smiled amiably at the patient and trustful yellow men; smiled to conceal the wrath and disappointment that rankled in his heart. Half his profits were lost, and there was probably more trouble in store for him.

"You savee now?" he impressed upon the leader of the Chinamen. "You in United States here. No more danger. You all safe. You walkee straight ahead three-four miles. Come to New York by and by. Good man he meet you there."

The leader of the band, after listening attentively, translated the substance of Korry's remarks to his companions. They broke into excited and happy chattering and seemed eager to be on their way. In their childish ignorance how were they to know the truth? New York Chinatown was but a few miles away. The captain of the boat had told them so. Their journey's end was just beyond.

"You no come back here," Korry warned the leader, as the happy caravan prepared to start off. "No come back. Savee? Government man catchee you. Send back to China."

The skipper and his mate watched the joyful, unsuspecting Chinese depart. Clad in straw hats and new store clothes they presented a strange and pathetic spectacle as they stumbled along in single file behind their leader and disappeared in the pathless, swampy interior of the island. In half an hour they would be lost. After a day or so of frantic wandering, unable to find fresh water or food, tortured by insects and crazed by hunger and thirst, their doom was inevitable.

Korry looked after his victims with the utmost dispassion. Conscience he had none, where his own welfare was in the balance. Other cargoes had been dis-

posed of in like fashion. Once, when capture threatened him he had, one at a time, flung them overboard. That was better than being caught red-handed.

Korry looked upon a Chinaman as he might upon a case of whisky—a thing to be delivered when delivery was possible, or to be disposed of speedily at the first intimation of danger.

"Lucky we had no wise hop-head in the bunch," he remarked to Meech as the two waded back to the boat. "I've carried 'em occasionally. Smart guys who've been in this country before and knew the ropes. After being deported they've been smuggled in again. You can't put much over on 'em. They'd have queered my game just now, knowing New York wasn't just on ahead a few miles through the palms."

Meech, for all his career of villainy, seemed rather shaken at what he had witnessed. The thought of those dozen yellow men marooned to die horribly did not rest lightly in his mind. Killing wasn't so bad in a crisis, but this——

Back on the launch again the men set about to clean up, to remove all traces of their former passengers. The ports were opened, the cabin swept clean, a smudge started below deck that would clear the air and at the same time drive away the swarms of mosquitos that were becoming vicious.

Korry was lounging on deck, feet cocked upon the rail, and apparently enjoying his pipe, when the revenue cutter's dinghy, with an officer and a dozen men aboard, swept alongside. A moment later the officer and four men were over the rail.

"Hello! What's the excitement?" Korry asked, regarding the officer with a look that simulated surprise as well as displeasure.

The officer, unimpressed, strode up to where the skipper sat. "Cut out the bluff, Korry!" he snapped. "We've been waiting for you since midnight. Hung yourself on a bar, did you? I'm surprised. Always took you for an able steersman."

Korry shrugged and leisurely relighted his pipe. "What's that to you?" he inquired.

"Had a report you left Havana last night with twelve passengers. Still aboard, are they?"

"Suppose you find out."

The officer disappeared below deck; he reappeared a few minutes later with chagrined countenance and stormy eyes. "Put them ashore, did you?"

"Did I?" Korry surveyed his accuser with a challenging sneer.

"Oh, come now! Talk sense! You had a cargo of monkeys aboard when we first sighted you off Palm Key. Where'd they go?"

"Did you look through the lockers? Some of 'em may have crawled into the gas pipes. Always heard a chink was slippery."

The officer turned to study the nearest shore line, firmly convinced that the aliens had been hurried across the bar and sent inland. It was an old and familiar trick of the threatened smuggler; and it usually worked, for the crew of the Federal cutter were not permitted to land and scour the islands. That task was assigned to the immigration officials ashore.

Korry was known to the Federal agents of the Seminole State as the most daring and resourceful of all Chinese runners. Trap after trap had been laid for him, and the keenest of government hounds had followed his trail; but the wily smuggler always outwitted them. Often, as on this occasion, it was at a distinct loss to himself; nevertheless it meant his safety.

An arrest could not be made without tangible evidence. The fact that Korry had been seen leaving port with his Celestials, that he had attempted to evade pursuit, and that the authorities were positive he had disposed of his contraband, could not be held sufficient to condemn him. The smuggler had to be caught red-handed before the machinery of the law began to grind out the inevitable penalty.

The officer knew that; so did Korry. And so, for that matter, did Meech, who came up from the engine room and squatted on the roof of the after cabin, an appreciative listener to the exchange of pleasantries between the law and the lawbreaker.

"We'll get you and your cargo together one of these days, Korry," the

baffled officer predicted, "and you'll spend the remainder of your happy hours making little stones out of big ones."

"I'm not worrying about it," the smuggler observed tranquilly.

"You've given us more trouble than all the other chink runners put together. It won't last much longer."

"Well, I never trouble folks who don't trouble me. I mind my own business and thank others to do the same."

"I suppose you come up here regularly for the fishing, eh?"

"Plenty of tarpon hereabouts. If you've got nothing better to do, I'll rig up some tackle and we'll go after 'em. I'm at liberty until the tide comes in."

"Expect to pick up your cargo again when we leave, do you?"

"I hope to be in Havana before dark," Korry replied.

"We'll keep you company for a time."

"Suit yourself! I've no objections."

The officer, who was determined that Korry should not again take on his landed passengers, kept his word. He and some of his men remained on board until noon, when the tide came back high enough to float the stranded launch. More than that, once the launch was under way, Korry was ordered to take the dinghy in tow and head through the channel toward the cutter which lay at anchor in the open Gulf.

Later, after listening to a few choice remarks from the officer, Korry was permitted to depart. The cutter trailed him for two hours, until it was evident that the smuggler did not intend to double cross the officials and that he proposed to make Havana; then the Federal boat turned back to resume its regular patrol.

The officer in charge, smarting under the ruse that had been played upon him, sent a long wireless message in code to a government representative in Havana. The nefarious activities of one Jud Korry, smuggler of Chinese, were becoming intolerable; an end must be put to them. His unchecked operations were a reflection upon the efficiency of the immigration authorities, and some measure, however desperate, must be taken to thwart the smuggler.

Korry, naturally, was far from pleased at the misadventure of the morning, and the thought of not being able to collect on a "landing receipt," which would have been given him had the dozen saffron-hued passengers been put ashore at the designated bayou, rankled in his heart. It was not often he had failed. Still, he and his boat were safe, and that was some consolation. Better luck next time!

He was not afraid to make a report to the smuggling tong with whom he did business. The prudence of a chink runner did not deter their operations in the least. A certain loss and risk were expected. Korry and his speedboat were necessities; that he was unable to make good on every transaction was a natural conclusion. It was to be regretted, of course, but not held against him.

So long as the Chinese of the United States needed their cousins to relieve a labor shortage, just so long did the smuggling tong prosper. If two thirds of the total aliens shipped across the Caribbean reached the States in safety, the tong and all those employed by it were content. What happened to the unfortunate one third, whether caught and deported, or marooned on a desert key to starve, or dumped overboard for shark meat, mattered little. The greater the loss, the higher the rate exacted from the consignee.

At dusk, an hour out of Havana, Korry sighted a trim, gleaming white yacht with a Tampa Yacht Club pennant fluttering at its bow. He studied her closely through his glasses.

"The *Flamingo* of Tampa," he announced at length. "Wonder what she's doing here?"

"Pretty-lookin' baby, ain't she?" remarked Meech.

"Belongs to Newberry." Korry knew most of the pleasure craft that, during the winter season, plied the Cuban and Florida waters. He recalled that Caleb Pruett, an old acquaintance, was her skipper, and decided to make a call on him ashore.

CHAPTER IV.

SIGNPOSTS OF ADVENTURE.

AFTER a week at the Havana restaurant, Andrew Brant, erstwhile cabaret performer, was given notice. Just why he was unable to discover. The proprie-

tor of the café merely shrugged, which implied any number of things. Subsequently, Brant was unable to connect with anything remotely resembling a job, and the services of a gifted *Americano* went begging.

Faced with this ominous predicament, he made valiant and futile efforts to earn his passage to New York, or even across to Key West. He spent most of his time along the docks, watching the departing liners, the big, freight-car ferries, the graceful yachts that belonged to American millionaires, and the swift, birdlike hydroplanes that sped in a few hours as far north as Miami. But it was useless. It was as difficult to escape from Havana with a lean purse as to reach the stars with a ladder.

Now at one time in the past, when the clouds had more of a silver lining, Brant had reckoned his future with the stars, horoscopically speaking; and, according to the horoscope, he was cast for robust adventure. Moreover, the stars predicted that he would arrive at a wintry old age.

Robust adventure was somewhat to his liking; but so far, it seemed, the stars were slightly off their course. Still, he was ready for it. Adventure and romance fairly permeated Havana. One rubbed elbows with it at every turn of the road. The very atmosphere was full of it.

After waiting more or less patiently, however, Brant concluded that what was written in the stars was pure hokum; that Adventure, Romance and Company cared no more for his services than did the café proprietors or the departing vessels.

On that particular evening, when he had admired the sunset and for the first time discovered that Morro Castle resembled the post-card views of it, the collector for the seats made Brant retreat to the side lines, where the benches were less comfortable and the crowds more promiscuous. He dickered with a swarthy peddler for the best *un tabaco* at the lowest possible price.

Later, he found himself an empty bench on the far side of the square that was adorned by melodramatic Latin statuary and sheltered by palm and laurel. Drawing meditatively upon his recent purchase, his thoughts remote from his surroundings, Brant presently became aware that a newcomer had usurped the far end of his bench.

Lazily, he turned. His indifference vanished magically when he glanced at his companion. The girl, sitting within three feet of him, was unmistakably American, undeniably attractive, and, so far as he could judge, alone. He wondered at that, for most of the tourists had gone, and winsome bits of femininity from the States—unaccompanied—were rare enough to arouse speculation.

Guardedly, and perhaps stealthily, Brant surveyed the girl. After one fleeting glance at him, she kept her face averted. He did not endeavor to attract her attention or to make advances, although had the opportunity presented itself he might have been a partner to a mild flirtation. Almost anything that would have broken the deadly monotony of things would have been welcomed.

Evidently the fair creature at the far end of the bench was not in a flirtatious spirit. She sat perfectly quiet, her eyes fixed upon the lighted square beyond, where, on an elevated platform, the band members were assembled.

The music, so long in starting, blared suddenly; and just as suddenly Brant heard the girl's voice.

"Please be careful," she was saying, and for a moment he was not certain if she was addressing him. "I must not be seen speaking to you. Can you hear me?"

"Perfectly!" answered Brant.

The girl had not turned. She seemed intent upon the music and the crowds that passed; appeared to ignore his presence entirely.

"I am being watched and followed." Once again her voice reached his ear. "I have a message that must be delivered. There is no time now to ask or answer questions. Will you do me that kindness?"

"I'm at your service," Brant responded. He realized then and there, thrilling at the thought, that Adventure had given him the high sign. Perhaps the stars weren't wrong after all!

"Be careful!" The girl's warning came sharply.

Quick to obey instructions, Brant relighted his cigar, puffed calmly upon it, and seemed to be interested only in the music. He even turned slightly on the bench, so that his back was partly toward his companion. The girl was the stage director of this particular scene; and like a well-trained actor, he implicitly followed orders, even though he had no script to guide him, and the business of the scene was still uncertain.

The music stopped; an encore followed the applause. Brant waited impatiently. What had happened? Was his companion being too closely watched? Did some one in the shifting crowd beyond suspect?

"I will drop the message behind the bench." The girl's voice sounded again. "It is addressed. I must trust you to deliver it. When I have gone, move over and reach back. Stay a few minutes after I have left or—or they might suspect. Do you understand?"

"Every word." Brant's pulse raced expectantly.

"I have dropped it," she said.

He wanted to turn, but dared not. He kept his cigar going. "After I have delivered the message—what then?" he asked cautiously. "Shall I see you again?"

"Perhaps."

"Make it more definite," he urged. "Are you in trouble? Let me be of more service to you than a mere messenger boy."

"Thank you very much; but there is nothing more to be done—now."

"To-morrow, then?" he suggested hopefully. "Where can I see you? You'll want to know if I've delivered the message safely."

"I'll know if you've been successful," she replied. "Good night—and good luck."

The girl arose and walked away. Brant dared not turn to follow her course; dared not betray the slightest interest in his mysterious companion.

At length he did turn and with as much indifference as he could command moved along on the bench. Just as slowly he reached back his hand, fumbling in the shadows of the low hedge for the message the girl had dropped.

With the abruptness of an electric shock, Brant's groping fingers came in contact with a moving object. He choked down the startled exclamation that leaped into his throat, while his fingers closed mechanically upon a man's lean wrist.

The next instant, alive to the danger that threatened, he leaned over to peer into the hedge where the skulker lay among the shadows, singularly quiet, uttering no protest at being caught and detained. It was light enough for Brant to see, clutched in the man's hand, the letter he had promised to deliver.

The situation revealed itself. The man must have crept into the hedge back of the bench; doubtless he had overheard the girl's instructions and intended to avail himself of the message. Just why, Brant could only surmise; but most fortunately he had acted in time. Another second of delay and the man and the letter would have vanished.

With his free hand, Brant tugged at the letter; but the fingers that held it tightened desperately. Impatient at the delay, Brant twisted viciously on the man's wrist. It had an immediate and surprising effect.

With a snarling imprecation, the unknown reared up among the shrubbery, dealt Brant a blow, jerked free his wrist, and darted away. Although momentarily dazed by the unexpected attack, Brant recovered and started in pursuit, more than thankful that his quarry had set a course along a deserted thoroughfare. He preferred to deal with the man without raising an alarm or attracting attention.

The purloiner of the letter had gained considerable headway; but he remained in sight, and Brant rapidly overtook him. Apparently aware that he could not escape by running, the man darted into an open court that was lighted by a street arc, stopped, tore open the envelope, and scanned the inclosure as Brant pounced upon him.

A moment later Brant had the man pinned against the wall. He made no attempt to protect himself. Brant stepped back and picked up the envelope and inclosure which the man had tossed to the ground.

"I ought to punch your head!" Brant growled, surveying the thin-faced, grinning man, who now seemed more amused

than frightened at his captor's threatening attitude. "What do you mean by stealing this letter and reading it?"

The man continued to grin, but made no response. It occurred to Brant that his prisoner did not comprehend. As Brant's Spanish was as limited as, apparently, the other's knowledge of English, he saw no object in continuing his dialogue.

"Get going! Beat it!" he commanded, giving the man a shove. "Understand? Vamose!"

The man shuffled away, but when he had traveled a dozen yards, he looked back and broke into an ugly laugh. "You'll get yours!" he cried. "Better watch your step! You're buttin' in where you ain't wanted."

After delivering himself of that veiled threat, the man turned and started off on a brisk run. Brant let him go. He had recovered the letter and saw no good reason for delaying its transit.

Having decided upon that course, assured that the message was important and should be delivered at once, and wholly unperturbed at the threats launched against him, Brant glanced at the envelope and letter clutched in his fingers. The envelope was addressed to James Dixon, at a number on *Calle Huerfanos;* but the inclosure itself, which the thief had removed from the envelope in a desperate attempt to read it before being overtaken, was a single sheet of pink paper without a mark upon it.

Brant scowled as he turned the letter over in his fingers. A second and more deliberate scrutiny proved beyond all doubt that the inclosure was a blank. There was not a mark of any nature on either side of the pink-tinted sheet of paper; not so much as a bent corner or a peculiarity in its folding that might have represented some code agreed upon between sender and recipient.

Puzzled at the singular discovery, Brant replaced the letter in its torn envelope and once more studied the name and street number of the person to whom it was addressed. What conclusion was to be drawn? What object had the apparently distressed and resourceful young lady in seeking delivery of a blank message?

Obviously the thing was not a practical joke. The girl seemed too serious, too much exercised, to be play-acting. Besides, the culprit hiding behind the bench had been far too anxious to intercept the message, to open and read its contents. He must have suspected something; in all probability he had been the very man the girl spoke of as following and watching her. He was an American, too, although Brant had not judged so at first.

What the girl was up to and why she should have been spied upon, and why, if she was in trouble and danger, she did not enlist the help of the authorities, were questions that remained unanswered.

Brant found his curiosity getting the best of him, possibly because he had nothing better to occupy his mind, perhaps because it was a novelty for him to take part in a mystery that did not exist back of the footlights or on a printed page.

One thing was certain, he reflected as he thrust the letter into his pocket and started away—the thin-faced individual who had made off with the message had obtained little information for his trouble.

When Brant recrossed the Prado, ducking the press of automobile traffic that resembled a five-o'clock Fifth Avenue snarl, and set his face toward the heights that lifted gradually from the harbor, a new theory came to him. He recalled that the use of "invisible" ink was an old standby employed by characters who did not wish their communications read by alien eyes.

Perhaps the sender of the message he bore had used similar tactics, fearful that the contents of the letter might be scanned by undesirable persons. It was possible that the sheet of paper had to be immersed in certain chemicals before the written contents stood revealed. The idea seemed plausible enough.

At any rate the letter was addressed in plain script, and Brant had promised to deliver it, and whatever mystery was attached to the message was none of his affair. The recipient would have to do his own solving; and doubtless, when that was done, Brant would be thanked and asked to step out of the picture.

He had covered perhaps two squares, keeping to the narrow walk to avoid the

screeching, recklessly driven taxicabs, when, at a corner ahead, he beheld a crowd of excited pedestrians gathered around a car of the flivver variety.

Reaching the scene as an ambulance drove up, he learned that a man had been struck by a taxicab. The duck-clad hospital internes were applying first-aid treatment to the victim. When they lifted the patient onto the stretcher and rolled it into the ambulance, Brant, who had pushed himself forward, caught a close glimpse of the injured person. It gave him a start, for the flivver victim was the man he had pursued and overtaken a few minutes before; the threatening, thin-faced individual who had attempted to make away with the girl's letter.

A big-shouldered man in a linen suit and Panama hat was talking to the ambulance attendants and seemed to be somewhat exercised over the accident. At first Brant imagined him to be the taxi driver. Presently he stepped into the ambulance and rode off with the doctors and their patient.

Brant walked on speculatively as the crowd dispersed. He did not know, and it would have meant nothing at all to him if he had, that the big-shouldered man who rode away with the flivver victim, was Captain Jud Korry, Chinese runner.

CHAPTER V.

FINDING WAYS AND MEANS.

ANY number of important developments had come to pass since the night Captain Korry, after sighting the yacht *Flamingo*, had docked his craft and gone to his quarters ashore. The result of his failure, although not uncommon, bothered him; and the talk he held with certain mysterious agents, who furnished him with cargoes, did not serve to brighten his gloomy spirits.

Two nights later, accompanied by Meech, with ten Chinamen packed into the cabin of his launch, Korry essayed another excursion in the direction of American shores. At dawn the Federal cutter loomed up forbiddingly out of the early mists. As his engines began to misbehave when he crowded them, and Meech was unable to correct the trouble, Korry was forced to turn back. He saved his cargo on that occasion, but that afforded him little consolation.

Forty-eight hours later, with his engines repaired, Korry again set forth, only to meet with disaster when the Florida keys were within wading distance. A new type of revenue cutter, evidently of shallow draft and no mean speed, raced out from behind an island where doubtless it had lain in wait for Korry's appearance. Korry, after recovering from the shock, greeted the newcomer with a flood of choice Castilian, American, and Conch imprecations that won Meech's instant admiration and wholesome respect.

It took the angry but crafty Korry most of the day to outwit his nimble and tireless pursuer. He managed to shake off the Federal bulldog, owing to keener seamanship, a knowledge of the uncharted waters, and a sudden storm that descended upon pursued and pursuer at a most opportune moment.

Darkness followed the breaking of the storm. Korry, aware that his gas tanks were low, and that his agent ashore would not then be found at the appointed rendezvous, was once more compelled to return to the safe refuge of Havana harbor.

The taste of defeat, the second within four days, soured Korry's temper and digestion. It had never happened before. He suspected the reason and lay awake the greater part of the following night, considering schemes to overcome it.

The next morning at breakfast, when an item in the Havana *Post* caught his eye and held his undivided attention, an astounding plan flashed into his mind. Without delay he sent Meech down to where the *Flamingo* was docked, with instructions to invite Captain Pruett for luncheon at a certain quiet café. Korry had excellent reasons for not going in person. What not to do was as essential in his code as what to do.

Pruett appeared shortly before noon—a tall, sickly looking man past middle age, with faded blue eyes and mustache. He greeted Korry with genuine delight, and the two sea rovers seated themselves at a table in a secluded part of the side-street café.

Korry, taking time to study his com-

panion whom he had not seen for a year, made a few cautious inquiries before getting to the business that had brought them together. He learned from Pruett, who seemed talkative enough, that the *Flamingo* had come to Havana to pick up the daughter of its owner, Wilda Newberry. The young lady preferred her father's small but comfortable yacht in her journey back to Tampa to returning by the regular steamer. Newberry, himself, was in the North, where Miss Wilda was to join him later.

"You come all this way just to bring back the girl?" Korry inquired, meditating upon the time and trouble and expense required to satisfy the whim of one passenger.

"Just that," Pruett answered. "Come near backing down and telling Newberry to find another skipper, too," he added indignantly. "I'm a sick man. No business to be chasing around in this weather. I was ready to go to the mountains when this fool thing come up."

"We got mountains right here in Cuba," Korry remarked, his eyes intent upon the other's pinched cheeks and rounded shoulders. "Do you a lot of good if you went among 'em."

"I'm putting out of here in a couple of days," Pruett returned, as if to brush aside the suggestion. "Only waiting for Miss Wilda to say the word."

"Suppose you was took sick? Real sick, I mean. What then?"

"Have to lay over, I guess."

"The *Flamingo* wouldn't sail without you?"

Pruett looked his surprise. "Of course not! I come down with only three men—new hands I had to pick up for the trip. About as worthless as you could find. Two of them's already deserted."

Korry smiled in a manner to suggest that the *Flamingo's* predicament—and the skipper's frame of mind—were in keeping with his anticipated program. He kept silent, however, until the meal was served and eaten. A well-fed man was more easily persuaded.

After the cocktails, a steaming platter of *arroz con pollo,* and a chilled *ensalada* of *aguacate* and *alcachofas* followed, topped off with *dulces en almibar,* and washed down with sparkling *vino blanco.*

Pruett ate heartily and with evident enjoyment. With the black coffee and cigars, the *Flamingo* skipper leaned back in his chair. "You're looking fit, Jud," he observed, perhaps a trifle enviously. "In the—the same business, are you?"

Korry nodded. He was not ashamed of his trade. His friends knew—always had; most of them admired him for it. "You've been a fool," he told Pruett bluntly. "Two years ago I tried to get you——"

"Yes; I know," the other broke in, anticipating the substance of Korry's remark. "Guess I'm too much of a coward. Besides, I ain't strong enough to stand up under the strain. It takes a lot besides nerve."

"Huh! You stuck to your soft skipper berth because it was easy and safe. Drawing down a measly wage and taking orders from a toad like Newberry. And what you got for it? Money? I'll bet not! Nor health. You're at the end of your rope, and Newberry'll be kicking you out soon for a younger man."

"I guess so. I ain't worth much now. An old hulk like me——"

"What'll become of you?"

"Hard to tell. I got a little saved."

"How much?"

"A couple o' thousand," Pruett answered.

Korry broke into a harsh laugh. "That all? After working seven or eight years? I'm making twice that—in forty-eight hours."

"We can't all be so lucky."

"Lucky?" Korry scoffed. "You had the same chance. You got the same chance right now, Pruett." He leaned across the table. "How'd you like to double your savings in a day? Without lifting a hand yourself? No danger or risk. Make your pot four thousand."

Pruett started. "What you driving at, Jud?"

"You fix it for me to take command of the *Flamingo* on the trip north," Korry explained. "That's all. You can be took sick—bad; stay here or back in the mountains."

"I—I don't understand," Pruett wavered.

"I'll take your boat up to Tampa and pay you a couple o' thousand for the priv-

ilege. Where's the harm in it—for you? Wake up, Pruett! Better double your nest egg while you got a chance. You don't owe nothing to Newberry; and before next season he'll be setting you adrift."

The astounding significance of what Korry proposed to do gradually dawned upon the amazed *Flamingo* skipper. His cheeks flushed. "You—you mean to run up some monkeys?" he gasped.

"Of course!" Korry answered, smiling at the other's agitated countenance. "Twenty at least. I'll make it pay big."

"But—but——" Pruett stammered.

"Hold on now!" Korry admonished. "Don't throw a fit. It'll be the simplest thing in the world. No one'll suspect the *Flamingo*, least of all the immigration hounds. She's known in these waters——"

"So are you," Pruett managed to break in.

"But we won't advertise the fact that I'm her skipper. I'll pull out early in the morning, and along in the evening I'll land my cargo. Got the place in mind. Have a shore agent on the job to run the chinks up through Caxambos and Marco. Then we'll go on to Tampa. Newberry ain't there; and besides if he was, where's the harm? You was too sick to bring the boat up. I'm a registered pilot, and you turned the *Flamingo* over to me. That's all there's to it. I come back here, and you bank your share of the profits."

Pruett listened with undisguised amazement to his companion's glib recital. The proposition revealed was astounding. The honest *Flamingo* skipper was stunned at first; but presently, when his mind became normal and he reviewed the situation, he was shrewd enough to realize that the project, barring a few details, was not wholly impractical. Conniving with lawbreakers never had been an issue with him before, and he had decided scruples against such practices, although the majority of his friends were inclined to scoff at his attitude.

"How about Miss Wilda?" he ventured at length.

"Well, what about her?" Korry queried.

"She'll have to go aboard. The yacht can't sail without her; and she wouldn't stand for—for this thing."

"She won't need to know anything about it," replied Korry. "The chinks will be stored away in the crew's quarters. I'll put 'em on board the night before; and when it comes to landing 'em, we can wait till the girl goes to bed. I'll fix that all right enough," he added confidently.

Pruett shook his head dubiously. "She's smart. You can't fool her as easy as you think."

"I've been fooling smart people for a long time," Korry returned.

"Yes; I know," answered Pruett; "but it's different among men. You can handle them if it comes to a pinch. You'd have to promise me one thing, Jud," he went on. "No harm's to come to her. I wouldn't stand for that—not for a second. I got no love for the old man; but Miss Wilda's always treated me white. She's the finest girl you ever met."

"Don't worry on that score!" Korry spoke reassuringly. "She'll be as safe with me as she'd be with you. I wouldn't put her to a mite of danger. Not for all the profits of the trip. I'm rough and hard-hearted in my dealings with men," he added; "but no one can ever say I've harmed a woman. How about it now? Is it a bargain?"

Pruett still hesitated. "I—I don't know, Jud," he said. "Better let me think it over a while."

"No time for that. It'll take a couple of days for me to make my arrangements; besides, you may get sailing orders any minute. It's two thousand in your pocket, Pruett—half when my cargo's aboard, and the balance when I return. And you're not concerned in it at all. The law couldn't touch you, even if I was to get caught. You didn't know I was running contraband."

"What's the matter with your own boat?" the other inquired at length. "Broke down?"

"No. Spotted; that's all. It's watched all the time. The minute I leave port some sneaking government agent gets off a wireless to them Federal cutters, and they lay for me. Two times I been queered and had to put back without landing my cargo. I'll fool 'em this time, however," Korry asserted grimly. "It's the boat that's watched, not me; and so

long's it's tied up here they'll think I'm ashore. I'll be up to Tampa and back again before they get wise."

"I guess you could, all right," agreed Pruett. "How about me getting sick and fixing it for you to take the *Flamingo?*" he asked, apparently satisfied with everything up to that point.

"Easy enough," replied Korry. "You leave that to me. All you got to do, Pruett, is crawl into bed. I've a doctor who'll sit in the game with us for a liberal fee. He'll have you within a couple of inches of the grave before night, all for Miss Wilda's benefit—and mine."

Pruett drew in a long breath. The picture Korry had painted so graphically was distinctly alluring. A fortune—to him—tossed into his lap, and no risk attached. Wrong, of course; but it seemed that all the better things life had to offer always were labeled "Hands Off!" At best, his days were short, and he might as well make them comfortable.

"You're making it mighty attractive, Jud," he admitted, his voice a bit shaky. "Looks like it's heads we win and tails we can't lose. But you know what you're doing. I'll help all I can."

"You'll never regret it," Korry declared, beckoning to the waiter to bring another bottle.

The wily skipper, congratulating himself at the remarkable easy victory over the *Flamingo* captain, lost no time in attending to the many details necessary to bring about a successful and highly remunerative performance.

Before dusk, Captain Pruett had taken a bad turn and was put to bed in a room of a modest lodging house where Korry himself had quarters. The attending doctor, after a few words with the chief conspirator, seemed quite disturbed over his patient's condition.

Upon that carefully set stage, with the actors properly cued and the business of the scene rehearsed, Wilda Newberry was introduced. The physician explained that his patient was in a critical condition, that absolute rest and quiet were essential for his welfare, and that in no circumstances could he be moved before thirty days—or perhaps longer.

It was in the sick room that Jud Korry, freshly shaven, dressed in clean linen, and looking as honest and decorous as it was possible for him to look, was introduced to the young lady and highly recommended by Pruett himself as a trustworthy and capable substitute skipper for the *Flamingo.*

Miss Newberry was genuinely distressed at the situation, insisted upon engaging a nurse and paying all expenses incurred. Had it not been for meeting her father in the North, the girl explained, she gladly would have postponed her sailing. As it was she must leave within the next forty-eight hours. She accepted Pruett's understudy without a moment of hesitation.

Korry gallantly escorted the young lady back to her hotel, promised to find the extra men for the crew, and assured her of his readiness to start North with half a day's notice.

Thus, without a hitch of any kind in the program of his own making, and elated at the glowing prospects ahead of him, Korry doffed his Panama, murmured a gracious *buenas noches,* and betook himself from the hotel.

He was blissfully unaware that a man near the desk watched him with amazed eyes; unaware, also, that, when he had departed, the man hailed Miss Newberry familiarly, led her into the quiet of a reception room and insisted upon learning certain astounding facts.

CHAPTER VI.

IN A WEB OF MYSTERY.

TO oblige the charming young lady who had intrusted him with the letter, Brant set about to speed its delivery. The accident he had come upon, and the identification of the taxi victim as the man who had so nearly thwarted his plans, did not long delay him. It was an odd coincidence, he reflected; that was all.

Later, he wondered if the stalwart individual in a linen suit, who had ridden off in the ambulance, might have been a friend of the injured man. If so, he must be concerned in the affair of the pink-tinted message. That theory aroused Brant and stirred his imagination.

Subconsciously he found himself drafting a thrill-spiced scenario; and throughout the continuity he figured as the re-

sourceful hero. All the essential ingredients were at hand. The thought of being cast to play opposite a particularly winsome leading lady, rescuing her from unknown dangers and foiling the workers of iniquity, was not unattractive.

Twice in the course of the next few minutes, Brant stopped to make inquiries, for the street he sought was in a strange part of the city, a mile or more from the business section. He never before had ventured into the picturesque maze of narrow streets, far remote from the haunts of inquisitive tourists. The winding, alleylike thoroughfares were dirty, ill-lighted, and swarming with life.

When the street was found, the number corresponding to that on the envelope revealed a squat, stucco building with huge shutters, railed balcony, and a bolted door that opened into a patio.

The house was dark and apparently untenanted. Brant thumped loudly upon the door, and repeated the summons again and again before it was unlocked and opened slightly.

"Hello! What's wanted?" It was a pleasant, though cautious, American voice that reached Brant's ears and dispelled whatever fears he might have entertained.

"I've a message here for James Dixon," Brant answered.

"Come in," was the instant response.

The door opened wide, as if the announcement had been a magic password, and Brant stepped inside. The wide patio beyond was dimly lighted, and the man who had admitted him was concealed in the shadows.

Once the door was shut and bolted, the man spoke again: "Go straight ahead. I'll be with you in a minute."

A spacious room with a wide-beamed ceiling, sparingly but comfortably furnished, opened at the end of the patio. The floor was of the conventional Spanish tile, over which rugs were scattered. The windows were high and wide and shuttered. The room was lighted with wall candelabras. On a broad mahogany table a small, shaded reading lamp cast a circle of peculiar bluish light.

After entering the room, Brant looked back, wondering at the delay of his host. He could make out the dim form of the man, still at the street door, peering through a narrow, barred opening in the upper panel.

"Just wanted to make sure you weren't followed," the man explained when he came into the room.

Brant found himself in the presence of a tall, good-looking individual, clad in shirt sleeves, slippers, and linen trousers, who favored him with an openly appraising scrutiny.

"Are you Dixon?" Brant inquired.

The man nodded, his cold gray eyes probing the countenance of the newcomer. "Yes. Where's the message?"

Brant produced the envelope. "A young lady asked me to deliver it to you. I wasn't privileged to learn her name."

Dixon betrayed an immediate interest and at once plucked the letter from Brant's hand. Apparently ignoring the fact that the envelope was torn and unsealed, Dixon drew forth the inclosure and held it under the shaded lamp on the table.

Brant watched the man curiously, wondering what effect, if any, the blank sheet of paper would have upon the reader. He saw Dixon scowl as his eyes scanned something which to Brant was unrevealed.

"Just as I thought!" Dixon broke out, apparently forgetting his visitor.

The thing was beyond Brant, but he did not feel that he was entitled to demand an explanation.

"Sure you weren't followed?" Dixon asked, tossing the envelope and its inclosure upon the table.

"Pretty sure; yes."

"No one saw the young lady give you this letter?"

"Yes; some one did," Brant answered. "I suppose you noticed the condition of it. The young lady dropped the letter back of the bench upon which I was sitting. I was to recover it and deliver it. When she had gone, and I went to reach for it, a man concealed in the hedge already had the thing. I chased him a few blocks, but before I overtook him he had torn open the envelope and evidently read the message."

"Then what?" Dixon demanded suddenly.

"I got the letter and——"

"The man got away from you?" Dixon broke in.

"I didn't see any use in detaining him," Brant answered. "Didn't think it advisable to turn him over to the police. However, he didn't get far. He and a taxi disputed the right of way, and an ambulance carted him off."

"Badly hurt, was he?"

"Looked to be; yes. A husky chap with a black mustache seemed to be greatly disturbed over the accident and went along in the ambulance."

"Good Lord!" Dixon broke into a swift exclamation. "If that could have been——" He broke off sharply, turned to a cabinet, and drew from a drawer a handful of photographs.

From among the assortment he selected one and held it toward Brant. "Recognize this chap, do you?"

Brant did not hesitate. A glance convinced him. "Sure! That's the man who rode off in the ambulance."

Dixon's lips tightened. "Good enough! Look through these prints and see if you can identify the other chap—the one you took the letter from and who was hit by the taxi."

Obligingly, Brant glanced at the photos; but the taxi victim was not among the number. He told Dixon so.

"Well, no matter," the other returned. "My gallery of prize beauties is far from complete. You've identified the choicest one. He is known as Captain Korry. Ever hear of him?"

Brant shook his head. "Never. What's he captain of—a boat?"

"Yes. A speedy one."

"Didn't think he looked like the captain of a ball team or the local police," said Brant, wondering when explanations would be in order and some of the mystery dispelled.

"Any idea what this collection of rare photos represents?" Dixon queried.

"I have my suspicions. A pocket-edition rogue's gallery, isn't it? The bevy of handsome creatures you've shown me don't resemble movie heroes or retired missionaries."

A smile twitched at Dixon's lips. After a turn across the floor, apparently deep in contemplation of recent developments, he wheeled to face his visitor. "If you've been spotted," he said, "you may find yourself in trouble."

"You mean because I've obliged a lady and delivered a message to you?"

"Yes. The young lady in the case did not stop to think of the consequences. If Miss Newberry——"

"So that's her name, is it?" Brant interrupted. "Thanks! She would not divulge that much to me. Well, I'm not prostrated with apprehension," he went on. "Trouble's been at my heels ever since I landed on this Pearl of the West Indies. Don't expect to shake it until I'm leaving footprints in the asphalt around Forty-second and Broadway, if you happen to know where that is."

Dixon began to evince a new interest in his cheerful, candid-spoken visitor. Perhaps some of his earlier suspicions were routed. He plied Brant with questions; and because the latter scented a bit of excitement, and took an instant liking to the man himself, he rendered a graphic account of his Cuban calamities.

Dixon did not interrupt until Brant reached that point in his narrative dealing with his assault and imprisonment. Dixon insisted upon a thorough account of the affair; then he smiled significantly.

"You must have blundered in where you weren't wanted," he explained. "The monkey runners were active that night."

"It didn't register with me," Brant said. "I gathered from the conversation I overheard that a smuggling job of some nature was on foot; but I failed to understand where the monkeys came in."

Dixon laughed, apparently amused at his visitor's ignorance. "A monkey is a trade name for a Chinaman. Sometimes they're referred to as pieces of silk."

"Chinamen?" echoed Brant, amazed. "Then the boat I saw creep out to sea the other night probably had a cargo of them aboard! Contraband, are they?"

Dixon gave a confirmative nod. "Very much so. The Chinese have been barred from the States for forty years, with the exception of properly accredited students, merchants, and tourists; but they're coming in all the time—hundreds of them—thanks to the daring monkey runners. The smuggling of liquor and dope is small fry in comparison."

"That's news to me," admitted Brant.

"There are no bars against Orientals ere, and Cuba has become a vast store-

house for the smuggling tong. Chinks are dumped here by the boatload, their passage financed by friends or relatives in the States. Around twelve hundred dollars is the usual price. When that's paid in full, John Chinaman embarks on the last lap of his journey from the Far East—Florida. Until the cash is forthcoming, the pigtail is the property of the tong and leased to the sugar-cane growers."

Listening to Dixon, Brant's nimble mind operated at high speed. He eyed his host speculatively. "One of those great lights you read about is slowly breaking upon me. I'll wager Uncle Sam is paying your salary; and those mugs you displayed in the picture gallery are chink runners!"

"Barely possible," was Dixon's noncommittal reply.

Brant grinned. "Give me time enough, and I'll fit together this jig-saw puzzle," he returned. "I've placed you and the chap whose photo I've identified. Where does Miss Newberry fit in? Hold on, now!" he exclaimed, as Dixon seemed on the point of interrupting. "Let me demonstrate my keen analytical powers. Didn't I see an item in the Havana *Post* a few days ago about the Newberry yacht putting in here?"

"Probably. The *Flamingo* is at the Almandares Slip, awaiting Miss Newberry's orders to sail for Tampa."

"Well, that's that. Say," Brant spoke out, after a moment of reflection, "you don't want me to think the girl and her yacht are mixed up with chink running, do you?"

"You've a vivid imagination, Brant," Dixon returned with continued evasiveness. "A brilliant scenario writer was lost when you decided to caper behind the footlights."

"Why beat about the bush?" Brant queried, all eagerness. "There's dirty work at the crossroads. I can see that without half trying. Why not let me in on it? I'm free, white, and twenty-one. I'll turn my hand at anything short of murder, if Miss Newberry requests it; and I may even rise to that in an emergency."

"I've no doubt of it, Brant," the other replied; "but I don't see where I could cast you for a part."

"Miss Newberry herself cast me for the part of a messenger boy," Brant asserted. "I've made good, haven't I? Surely I can double for a part in the acts to follow. If you're the stage director of this production——"

The tinkle of a bell cut short Brant's fervent appeal. Dixon turned suddenly. In the silence that fell the sound was repeated.

"A visitor," Dixon remarked in a tone that, to Brant, conveyed a note of uneasiness. "Pardon me a moment. This is my butler's night out," he added with a smile.

Dixon left the room and passed through the dimly lighted patio toward the street door. Brant waited, eyes and ears alert. The thought that, after stumbling headlong into adventure spiced with romance, he was to be denied a more active participation in the mystery-touched program to come was discouraging.

He awaited Dixon's return with growing impatience, firmly resolved to make a final appeal before stepping out of the picture and swallowing his disappointment. Perseverance had landed him more than one engagement when the early outlook seemed unfavorable.

The big room and the patio beyond seemed unusually quiet; and when fully a quarter of an hour had elapsed and his host had not reappeared, Brant set forth to investigate.

The dim patio, open to the stars, filled with a profusion of plants and flowers, was deserted. A tiny fountain bubbled musically. Brant peered toward the far street door. It seemed to be slightly open. He wondered if Dixon had gone out; then decided that he had until, when his eyes accustomed themselves to the dim light, he saw a huddled form on the tile floor just inside the door.

He called sharply; but only the echo of his own voice came back to him. With quickened steps and misgiving thoughts, he advanced. An instant later he was kneeling on the floor beside Dixon, calling him by name and shaking his arm. As the man made no response whatever and seemed ominously cold and inert, Brant picked him up and with difficulty managed to get him back into the lighted room.

There, after placing Dixon upon a couch and making a swift examination, Brant smothered a horror-stricken cry. His host was dead. That instantly was determined. When Dixon's shirt, crimson-stained, was torn aside, the wound was revealed. A glance was sufficient to show that a knife blade, cunningly aimed, had reached the man's heart.

A trifle shaken by that gruesome discovery, Brant stepped back and endeavored to marshal his thoughts into orderly sequence. It was odd, he reflected, that Dixon had made no sound, no outcry. He must have opened the street door in answer to the bell, and swift and silent death had awaited him.

Who was the visitor? What had prompted him to do murder? There could not have been a struggle. Surely, Brant reasoned, he would have heard it. Dixon must have been taken unawares.

Brant's mind began to function with unwonted alacrity. The unexpected and tragic culmination of the night's adventure had surrounded him with a web of entangling mystery. A dozen vague and disturbing theories assailed him. Any one of them would have accounted for Dixon's premeditated murder.

Theories and suppositions, however promising, were not permitted to overshadow the present situation in which Brant found himself. What was to be done now? Get in touch with the police? Lose no time in trailing the assassin? Obviously, that was the thing to do; yet halfway across the room, his eyes searching for a telephone, Brant checked himself.

A new and alarming angle manifested itself, overshadowing that which was, conscientiously, his duty. For a brief time he had forgotten his own participation in the affair. How was he to explain his presence in the house? Who would believe his account of the tragedy?

Brant was a stranger in Havana. He had not known Dixon. He could not render a truthful account of his actions without bringing Miss Newberry into the case; and that, above all else, was to be avoided. Doubtless the girl was deep enough in trouble without plunging her into fresh ones.

The thing for him to do, Brant reasoned, after viewing the situation from every angle, was to leave the premises and get in touch with Miss Newberry. Then, after explaining matters to the girl, they could decide upon the next move. That action seemed to be the rational thing to do in the present crisis.

Having made his decision, and with a last glance at the still form upon the couch, Brant left the room and passed through the patio. The street door was still open. Apparently the assassin, after striking down his victim, had not taken the trouble to close it behind him, but had fled into the obscurity of the dark street.

As Brant reached the door a new and alarming possibility darted into his mind. He halted abruptly. It occurred to him that the house, and particularly the door leading onto the street, might be watched. Brant did not care to be seen leaving the premises.

Confronted by that disturbing thought he decided to retrace his steps and seek a new avenue of escape. The patio walls were high and not to be readily scaled and all the windows of the house securely barred; still, he reasoned, there must be a door in the rear that would afford means of exit—probably lead him into an alleyway. He would have to take chances on that exit being unwatched.

Brant was on the point of turning back along the patio in quest of another means of escape, when the street door opened noiselessly and a shadowy form was visible on the threshold. Then, with a quick movement, the intruder stepped into the patio, and the door was closed.

CHAPTER VII.

WRITTEN IN THE STARS.

INSTANTLY, aware that he could not conceal himself for any length of time, Brant flattened himself against the wall, thankful that the lights in the patio were dim. One thing was surprisingly clear to him, however. It quickened his pulse and set his thoughts galloping. The newcomer who, unannounced, had entered the patio, was a woman. He caught a fleeting glimpse of her slender, skirted form as she was framed in the doorway.

After an interval of silence in which

Brant waited expectantly, his eyes peering into the distant shadows that screened the intruder, the woman called:

"Mr. Dixon! Where are you?"

The familiar voice stirred Brant and brought him forward. "Don't be alarmed, Miss Newberry!" he said reassuringly, stepping into the light that came from the door of the living room beyond. "Remember me, don't you?"

The girl advanced slowly. She came up to where Brant stood, her wide eyes fixed upon his countenance. Doubtless she recognized him at once as her bench companion and willing accomplice of a few hours before. At any rate his presence in the house was accounted for, and whatever fears she may have entertained at his abrupt appearance vanished instantly.

"What brought you here at this hour?" Brant asked, as the girl continued to survey him narrowly. "Was it another message that had to be delivered in person?"

"Where is Mr. Dixon?" the girl countered quickly. "I must see him at once."

"Wait! Please!" he exclaimed and placed a detaining hand upon her arm as she started toward the living room. "There has been a—a tragedy. Dixon was murdered half an hour ago."

Brant would have prepared her for the shock had it been possible, would have led up to it less abruptly; but, in the emergency, circumstances thwarted him. He was given no opportunity to soften what must have been a blow.

The girl recoiled, her face blanching; but she seemed to regain possession of herself almost at once. Brant admired that quality in her, and, as quickly as he could find words, revealed the meager details that were in his possession.

Miss Newberry listened attentively and without interrupting. There were tears in her eyes when he had finished. Presently he led her to the living-room door, and together they looked across at the silent form on the couch.

"My name's Brant," he said at length, introducing himself. "Dixon told me yours. I delivered the message to him. I was just ready to leave here when you appeared. I had not considered it advisable to inform the authorities of this crime—at least not until I had seen and talked with you."

He found it difficult to explain matters clearly, when so much of the night's adventure was shrouded in mystery.

The girl's questioning, tear-dimmed eyes searched Brant's countenance. "Then—then Mr. Dixon told you——" she began.

"Nothing except your name," Brant was quick to assure her. "I made a few deductions of my own during our conversation, and Dixon did not offer to contradict them. Please do not think me presumptuous, Miss Newberry," he went on. "I'm not trying to pry into your affairs. If I seem at all inquisitive it is because I want to protect and help you."

She favored him with the same unwavering scrutiny, but reserved comment. She seemed to be weighing certain matters in the balance; debating whether to accept his statements.

He was given the opportunity of studying the girl closely, and in doing so his admiration and respect mounted steadily. There was that in her sincere countenance and clear, level eyes—apparently fixed upon him in silent judgment—that bespoke balance and self-reliance. She possessed a winsome attractiveness. The combination appealed to him.

"You were a friend of Mr. Dixon, of course," he went on presently. "Have you any idea who may be guilty of this crime?"

"Mr. Dixon had more enemies than friends in this city," she returned, evading a direct reply.

"I've no doubt. A man in his position would have," he agreed in a tone that purposely suggested much. Brant felt that the girl was withholding information; still he did not feel justified in demanding that which she seemed unwilling to divulge.

"What is to be done?" he asked at length. "There isn't much time to lose. It is for you to decide, Miss Newberry."

"What would happen if we called the police?"

"Well, I'd probably be taken into custody as a suspect; perhaps you as well. To clear ourselves we should be forced to explain the circumstances that brought us here to-night."

"I'm afraid that would complicate mat-

ters—just at present. It would defeat an end——" The girl broke off, her eyes troubled. "There is but one thing to do, Mr. Brant," she asserted in a surprisingly different tone, as if she had arrived at a decision after mature thought. "The right thing. I believe I can depend upon you. Are you willing to help? To take what may be a hundred-to-one chance?"

"In a minute!" Brant replied unhesitantly.

"I know who murdered Mr. Dixon," the girl went on. "At least I am certain who was back of the cowardly deed. It was Captain Korry, the most notorious chink runner in Havana."

"Korry?" Brant echoed, instantly recalling the name. "Why, Dixon and I were discussing him not half an hour ago. His photo is over there in the cabinet," he added, and related in a few words the circumstances that had brought about the discussion.

"That would seem to verify my suspicions," Miss Newberry said. "The man you took the letter from, and who was afterward struck by a taxicab, doubtless was employed by Korry to watch me."

"And from him Korry got Dixon's name and address," Brant added, beginning to understand. "Then Korry, or one of his hirelings, came here, called Dixon to the door and murdered him."

The girl nodded. "I am certain of it. Unfortunately we have no evidence to back the charge."

"Is that where the hundred-to-one chance comes in?" Brant asked quickly. "You propose to gather the necessary evidence against this murderer without the help of the police?"

Once more the girl nodded. "The *Flamingo* is to sail from Havana before noon to-morrow, with Captain Korry in command."

Brant received that announcement with amazement. "Korry in command of your yacht?" he repeated. "How in the world——"

"My skipper who brought the boat into port to pick me up was taken ill," the girl explained briefly, wasting no time in useless preliminaries. "At least I thought so at first. He recommended Korry as a substitute, and I accepted him without suspicion. That same night, when Korry brought me back to the hotel, Mr. Dixon was in the lobby and recognized the smuggler. Then we compared notes. Korry intends to run through a cargo of Chinamen to Florida in my boat."

"A frame-up between your skipper and Korry, was it?"

"Yes. Mr. Dixon learned what was brewing. Of course it would have been a simple matter for me to confront the conspirators and frustrate their plans; but Mr. Dixon advised against it."

"I see," Brant put in. "Dixon proposed to trap Korry—catch him redhanded."

"Mr. Dixon, whose position in Havana you already have surmised, was an old friend of my father's, and has been most active in his work here," Miss Newberry resumed. "Through him any number of smugglers have been caught. But Korry, who seems to be the most daring and cunning of the lot, always has managed to elude the traps laid for him. It would mean a great deal to Mr. Dixon, and the immigration authorities as well, if this troublesome character were apprehended. So when the facts were known to us, Mr. Dixon saw an opportunity to profit by them. The *Flamingo* was to sail at whatever time I set, with Korry in command and his human contraband hidden below deck. Mr. Dixon was to be my guest on board."

"Then Dixon wasn't known to Korry?"

"No. The smugglers knew that they were being watched in Havana and their sailings reported by wireless to the Florida officials; but until to-night they were unable to find the man responsible."

"The man who got away with your letter read Dixon's name and address on the envelope," said Brant. "He revealed it to Korry, and Korry, or one of his accomplices, put Dixon out of the way. The whole thing is clear enough now."

"I don't know yet how Korry came to suspect me," the girl said; "but he must have figured I would bear watching. That is why I did not want to lead him, or his agents, to Mr. Dixon—why I asked you to deliver the message to-night."

Brant nodded. "What object had Dixon in sailing on the *Flamingo?*" he asked. "Was it to protect you?"

"Partly that; partly to be sure Korry would not escape. The yacht is fast and of shallow draft. Although he expected to warn the officials of the sailing, he knew Korry to be an able skipper and a shrewd one. The revenue cutter could not overtake the *Flamingo,* nor could it follow the yacht in among the islands. I do not know exactly what Mr. Dixon's plans were; but he did not propose to let the smuggler get away."

Now that he was in possession of the details, Brant saw exactly what the venturesome girl had in mind. It seemed reasonably certain that Korry had been responsible for Dixon's death; but without evidence he could not be made to pay the penalty. If the authorities were informed of the tragedy and the sailing of the *Flamingo* canceled, the whole affair would go on the rocks. Korry could be arrested on Miss Newberry's testimony; but the evidence was, so far, purely circumstantial. Nothing could come of it, and in the end he would be released.

The girl was shrewd enough to see that. Evidence, there had to be; therefore the *Flamingo* would sail, with Korry in command. Moreover, she was to rely upon him—Brant—to accomplish what Dixon had planned to do. Dangerous as it seemed, Brant never for an instant hesitated to accept the part offered him.

"We'll get Korry one way or another," he declared emphatically. "You may not find me as resourceful and capable as Dixon, but I'll do my best."

"I am sure you will," the girl responded, a quick color rising in her cheeks. "It is for Mr. Dixon—to finish what he set out to do—that we must succeed. It is, perhaps, to avenge a despicable crime. Trap this smuggler, even though we do not wring the truth from him. Then we need not feel that the man who sacrificed his life in the pursuit of his duty has died in vain."

Brant's eyes kindled. "It's worth fighting for," he told her. "I wouldn't want a bigger, better mission."

"Perhaps I shouldn't have come here to-night," Miss Newberry said presently; "but I wanted to warn Mr. Dixon to be ready to leave in the morning. I was afraid you would be prevented from delivering the message."

Brant's thoughts went back a few hours in the past and he wondered if the last of the mystery was to be cleared. "About that message," he began. "You see, the man I chased from behind the bench, ripped open the envelope and——"

"Where is the message now?" the girl broke in.

"Dixon tossed it aside after reading it."

"We had better take it with us. It might prove to be a clew, for the authorities."

"A clew?" echoed Brant. How a blank sheet of paper could furnish a lead for the police was beyond him.

Nevertheless he walked across the floor and picked both envelope and inclosure from the table where Dixon had flung them. As he did so, turning over the sheet of note paper, he voiced an amazed exclamation. The message, clearly written in a feminine hand, stared him in the face.

"What the deuce!" he gasped; but as he turned to the girl, puzzled, intent upon solving the riddle that baffled him, a new and alarming sound reached his ears.

"Some one is at the door!" the girl broke out.

"Quick!" Brant commanded, at once alert, thrusting the letter into his pocket. "This way!"

Without question or hesitation, the girl obeyed. Grasping her arm, Brant led her through a small doorway. There, in the darkness of an adjoining room, they halted.

"It was a key rattling in the lock," Miss Newberry whispered.

"A key! Yes; sounded like it. Did Dixon employ a servant?" Brant queried, seeking to account for the newcomer.

"I believe so. A native boy."

"That must have been him. Don't think he saw us, but he'll raise an alarm soon enough. It's up to us to find a way out of here. Must be a rear exit somewhere."

"Through the kitchen," the girl directed, remarkably cool and collected in the crisis. "Father and I visited here last winter. I remember now. It's just beyond."

They moved cautiously, guiding themselves by the wall. Brant dared not strike a light, and they took pains not to crash into the furniture. The kitchen was

reached. A low window admitted a faint light from the stars, sufficient to identify the place.

Brant shot back the bolt of the kitchen door, opened it cautiously, and, as the alleyway seemed deserted, the two conspirators, thrown together by a queer prank of fate and united in a common cause, sped down the narrow thoroughfare. Reaching the street they halted to reconnoiter; presently they continued more leisurely.

The street was empty save for themselves, and most of the house lights were extinguished. Brant had no knowledge of the district through which they traveled, and no idea where the street itself led; but after walking several blocks they came upon a parked cab.

The sleepy *cochero,* aroused, was ordered to carry his fares to *Parque Central—pronto.*

Arrived at their destination, which was ablaze with lights and gay with Havana's night life, Brant parted with *cuarenta centavos.* The cab moved off, its driver sputtering indignantly at the absence of a tip. The man flung something over his shoulder, which might have been Cubanese for "cheap sport."

Brant ignored the remarks and turned to his companion, who had stepped back among the shadows of the park trees. "So far, so good," he observed. "What's our next move?"

Instead of answering at once, the girl led him through the park, now given over to derelicts on the benches and the whining vendors of lottery tickets. "The *Flamingo* will sail at noon to-morrow," she said quietly. "You still are willing to come?"

"Never more so," he responded, in a tone that left little doubt of his sincerity.

To their right, the ornate Theater Nationale loomed up. Taxicabs whirled up and down with screeching horns and brakes. Brilliant sidewalk cafés were filled with gay and noisy patrons. Newsboys bellowed; trolley cars clanged; the multicolored signs flashed their wares and shamed the crescent moon overhead. *La Belle Habana* envied not the garish splendor that was Gotham's.

In the lobby of the *Pasaje*, with its cool floors of tile, its ponderous arcade, its white-clad attendants, and its café resplendent with midnight diners, Brant bid *buenas noches* to his companion.

"You will call for me here at eleven to-morrow," she requested.

"At eleven, *manana,*" he repeated, and pressed her fingers that for a moment rested in his own.

Brant retraced his steps along the glittering Prado, unmindful of the flashing lights, the throngs that jostled him, the sounds of merriment. His thoughts were too full of to-morrow and the danger trail ahead to consider that which surrounded him.

It was not until the gay crowds and the lights had been put behind him, and he was turning into a quiet side street that led toward his own quarters, that he lifted his eyes to the stars. They were intensely big and bright and comforting. He smiled up at them, happily, for their prediction had come true.

Adventure! The stars had ordained it so.

CHAPTER VIII.

READY FOR EMERGENCIES.

AFTER a satisfying breakfast, Brant strolled leisurely from his boarding-house table, with a friendly word to the *la patrona*, who looked after him with growing suspicion. A guest, however gracious, whose bill has been long overdue, is viewed after the same fashion in *La Isla Cuba*, as in any city of the United States, particularly when the lodger belongs to the "profession," and the contents of his baggage are of doubtful value.

Brant, however, had no misgivings, although he walked toward the *Pasaje* with a knowledge that the prospect of his return was highly uncertain. To explain matters to the landlady might have been embarrassing and inconvenient, so he passed up those formalities. Some time in the future, if the stars continued friendly, he proposed to square his debt and claim his meager belongings.

Scenes of a similar nature had been assigned to him frequently in the past, and stage fright did not mar his present, finished performance. His "walk-out" was above criticism, theatrically speaking.

At the hotel, Miss Newberry did not

keep him waiting long. When she appeared, followed by a train of burden bearers, Brant helped her into the taxi, trusting that the fare to the dock would not exceed the solitary, crumpled bank note representing one dollar in the coin of his native *Estados Unidos*.

On the way to where the *Flamingo* awaited its passengers, the girl chatted lightly, in a manner that suggested she was bound for a pleasure trip, instead of a voyage fraught with danger.

Although Brant was not apprehensive, he was rather dubious about his prospective reception on board the yacht and the manner in which the new skipper would receive a guest. When he mentioned it, however, Miss Newberry quieted his fears.

"I phoned Captain Korry this morning," she explained. "Told him you were an acquaintance of mine who would sail with us to Tampa."

"Didn't ask any questions?"

"Certainly not! Why should he? A skipper is not presumed to interest himself in such matters."

"No; not as a usual thing," agreed Brant; but mentally he decided that Korry would not be overjoyed at the prospect of carrying an extra passenger.

"Have you seen a paper this morning?" the girl asked suddenly.

"Forgot to buy one," he replied, which was not exactly the truth. He had thought of it, but hesitated to break his last remaining dollar.

"Here's the *Post*," she said, thrusting the English-printed edition into his hand and pointing to a short item.

Dixon's body had been found by the servant, who had called the police. A search of the premises had brought to light the knife with which the victim had been murdered and finger prints on the patio door that might establish the identity of the slayer. Little information could be had regarding the occupant of the house in *Calle Huerfanos*. Although death had been instantaneous, according to the physician, evidence showed that the body had been carried from the patio, where the crime was committed, to the living room, where the servant claimed to have found it. The servant was being held.

Brant looked up from the *Post's* brief account of the tragedy to meet the girl's searching glance.

"Strange there isn't a word about Dixon's business," he remarked.

"That will come out later," she said, "unless the government decides otherwise. It is possible that the secret-service officials will keep dark the nature of his profession."

"I suppose our own government will take a hand in the affair," Brant ventured. "Just at present the police are mystified. I never gave the thing much thought until the newspaper item mentioned it. Of course there must have been bloodstains on the patio floor; and as it is known that Dixon died instantly, the question naturally arises—who carried the body into the living room? And why?"

"We'll be prepared to clear up the mystery before long," the girl replied confidently. "Meanwhile the police will have to make their own deductions."

Contrary to his expectations, when the taxi arrived at the dock Brant was welcomed aboard the *Flamingo* by Captain Korry himself, with surprising courtesy and cordiality. Trim and clean in his white suit, gracious in word and action, the skipper exceeded himself in making Miss Newberry and her passenger-guest comfortable. Never by a look or unguarded gesture did he betray a sign of suspicion.

It was difficult for Brant to imagine that the amicable, quiet-spoken Korry was the infamous and crafty chink runner and the probable murderer of Dixon. The substitute skipper looked mild and inoffensive.

During the preparations for sailing, which began at once, Miss Newberry showed Brant over the trim yacht. The *Flamingo* was a sixty-footer, with two cabins aft and two amidship, a comfortable lounge and dining room combined, and crew's quarters and galley forward. It boasted of powerful, high-speed engines and wireless, and was electrically equipped throughout, including the galley range.

Built for Florida waters, of mahogany, cedar, and teak, shining with brass and copper and white enamel from bowsprit

to taffrail, it was essentially a rich man's plaything—the pride of a gentleman sailor who could afford so expensive a hobby. Nominally, Brant learned, her crew consisted of eight; but at the present, owing to the late season and short trip, her complement was reduced by half.

Neither of the passengers sought to penetrate beyond the galley; but Brant had been quick to observe that the hatch and ports in the forecastle were screwed down, although the morning was unusually warm, and that the doors leading into the crew's quarters, well up in the bow, were closed.

If Miss Newberry's suspicions were well-founded, and Korry had schemed to make use of his temporary skipper berth, then the cargo of yellow men lay beyond those doors. So far as Brant was able to judge, no other space was available. The Chinese must have been smuggled aboard during the night, packed into the hot, airless cabin, and sealed against prying eyes.

Brant's heart bounded swiftly. He met and understood the warning glance his companion shot him. What a radiant and courageous specimen of womanhood she was! Although aware of her present circumstances, Brant decided she must have brushed against the rougher corners of life in the past. It seemed unlikely that a girl, always surrounded by luxury and extravagance, would have turned out so capable and efficient, so ready to face discomfort and peril.

When they were on deck again, and Brant had thrust a hand into his coat pocket, his fingers touched the letter placed there the night before. It recalled to mind an unsolved problem. He meant to return the letter and perhaps question the girl; but because they might be under surveillance while on deck he decided to await a more favorable opportunity. After all, the mystery was of little consequence. It had played its part; it had been the means of bringing together two adventuresome spirits. More vital matters were at issue now.

At twelve o'clock exactly the engine-room bell sounded, and with slowly churning screws, the *Flamingo* moved gracefully into the open water. Miss Newberry and Brant stood near the inclosed bridge, where Korry operated the wheel, and watched the receding shore line with its tinted houses, its picturesque harbor and busy docks bathed in the vivid glare of noon sunlight.

Once Morro Castle had been left behind and the sparkling Caribbean lay attractively ahead, the yacht increased its speed. Without crowding the engines, Korry believed that the first of the Florida Keys would be off their bows long before sundown.

The sight of Havana fading in the distance and the knowledge of what lay ahead of him, the thought of the yellow men below deck. and of the captain and his crew who were intent upon the landing of their contraband, filled Brant with queer emotions.

Plans they had none. There had been little time to discuss ways and means of trapping the smuggler. Yet between now and darkness—or that hour when Korry expected to put his unseen passengers ashore—some definite scheme must be thought out and perfected.

For himself, Brant was unconcerned. His thoughts were centered on the welfare of his companion. Miss Newberry must not be exposed to any unnecessary danger, even if the success of the undertaking should demand it.

It was a perplexing situation to face, where conspirator was pitted against conspirator, with the odds overwhelmingly in favor of a reputed black-hearted and remorseless smuggler.

When the engines had been tuned to their regular speed and the trim *Flamingo* plowed gracefully through the long swells, Meech came up on deck for a breath of air. After he had rolled himself a cigarette and lighted it expertly against the wind, he squinted forward to where Miss Newberry and Brant were standing. He was given his first close view of the passengers, and he regarded them with dubious and calculating eyes.

He touched his cap respectfully and smiled when, a few minutes later, the girl and her companion passed him on their way to answer the luncheon summons; but when they had disappeared, Meech's smile vanished, and his eyes darkened speculatively.

Korry's engineer had not been informed until the taxi rolled up to the dock and discharged its fares that an extra passenger was to sail. It looked ominous to him, coupled with certain other matters that had aroused his apprehension, although he had not had an opportunity to reveal them to the skipper. The latter doubtless would have told him to mind his own affairs and confine his croaking to the engine room.

Korry's admirable scheme had been hailed with delight in the beginning, and the prospects of a most successful trip were alluring, particularly so after the three misadvenures in the past. Even the fact that Miss Newberry was to accompany them did not blight his hopes, although it was his opinion that a woman and sub-rosa affairs did not mix.

However, the unannounced appearance of Miss Newberry's guest filled the engineer with misgivings. More than that, after a sharp scrutiny he convinced himself that the young man's face was familiar. Their paths had crossed before—and recently.

During a picturesque career afloat and ashore, Meech had developed certain essential qualities that often worked to his advantage in times of danger. However lacking he may have been in some respects, he boasted of a retentive memory. Just where he had seen Brant before, and in what circumstances, Meech was, momentarily, in doubt; but that he had seen the man was a certainty. It was merely a question of time before the problem solved itself.

Strangely enough, Captain Korry had entertained the same suspicion, although the fact did not disturb him. He was still pondering over the matter when Miss Newberry and Brant again appeared. By that time Meech had gone below.

The girl asked to take the wheel, and Korry readily obliged her. Miss Newberry was an able sailor, for the *Flamingo* had been her home during many cruises through the placid, as well as tempestuous, Florida waters. That she was experienced in nautical matters did not long escape the skipper's critical eyes.

"You could stand your trick at the wheel with the best of 'em, Miss Newberry," Korry declared. "Dare say you could follow a chart as well, eh? Who schooled you? Pruett?"

"Pruett and my father," the girl answered.

The skipper turned presently to Brant, who was watching the new helmsman with undisguised admiration. "Are you a water dog, too, young man?" he inquired.

"I'm afraid not," Brant responded. "I'm familiar with water tanks, though," he added. "Many a time I've hopped a freight in the shadow of one—provided the crew weren't too watchful."

Miss Newberry laughed at Korry's puzzled countenance. "Mr. Brant's an actor," she explained.

"Actor?" the captain repeated, still perplexed. His knowledge of "show folks" and their vicissitudes were limited. They belonged to a world far removed from his own.

"Havana wasn't overcordial to my brand of artistic endeavor," Brant continued. "My company gave up the ghost, mainly because the ghost failed to walk. I met with a slight misfortune, and the company sailed off without me. I was on the point of consigning myself as a stowaway when Miss Newberry came to my rescue."

Korry brightened at once as if the knowledge he had received had stirred a laggard memory. "I'm not much on visiting shows," he remarked, "but it seems to me I've seen you in Havana lately."

"Possibly you did," Brant remarked. "I filled an unpromising engagement at the Café Paris and——"

"That's it!" the captain exclaimed. "The Paris! I remember you now, Mr. Brant."

Korry smiled. Apparently the fact that he had succeeded in identifying his passenger pleased him. Brant smiled in turn. The fact that he had been identified had its advantages. As a cabaret performer, his appearance on board the *Flamingo* would not be viewed with suspicion. Doubtless, personally, the smuggler had nothing but profound contempt for one who followed Brant's activities.

Some time later, when the girl and Brant were leaning over the rail astern, Meech made his way forward to exchange a few pertinent remarks with his skipper.

"Say," he began in a cautiously lowered tone, "do you know who that chap is? The pretty he-passenger?"

Korry nodded. "Yes. He's a show actor. I found that out half an hour ago. Remember seeing him at the Paris."

"Show actor?" Meech repeated disgustedly. "Maybe he is; but that don't mean much. I remember seein' him myself. Couldn't place him till just now. He's the bird I rapped on the head and dumped into the warehouse the first night I went out with you."

The skipper frowned and regarded his engineer with a dubious glance. "Sure of it?" he inquired.

"Sure's I'm standin' here!" Meech declared emphatically. "I don't forget faces; not for long, anyhow. Funny he'd be sailin' with us, ain't it?"

"You figured he was a hijacker, did you? Took him to be shadowing you that night?"

"Nothin' else!"

Korry pondered gravely over the nature of Meech's revelations. "Brant don't look like a hijacker to me," he ventured at length, speaking from firsthand observation and past unpleasant encounters. "You're taking too much for granted."

"Think I'm lyin', do you?" the other came back resentfully.

"Not exactly. I'm not saying Brant wasn't the chap you hit, or that he didn't follow you, but outside of that——"

"Hijacker or revenue officer! What's the difference?" Meech broke in. "One's as bad as the other, ain't it?"

"Might be—on shore," the skipper agreed. "But on this boat, in the open, I guess we can handle things. Keep your senses about you, Meech! Don't go off half cocked."

"All right. Use your own judgment. I'm just tellin' you; that's all. Something's been cooked up for us we won't find appetizin'. Why, you had the same hunch yourself a while back."

"Changed my mind since."

"That girl's got a trick up her sleeve," persisted Meech. "I've felt so since last night."

"If she had one," the captain returned, "we've trumped it."

Meech cast a glance aft as if to make certain of where the passengers lounged and that they were beyond earshot. "You mean because—of Dixon?" he inquired softly.

Korry nodded. "If there was anything in the wind, he was behind it," the captain replied.

"And you don't think she knows?"

"If she did she wouldn't have sailed to-day. That's certain as sunrise."

Meech appeared to find logic in the other's theory. Dixon was now known—through information volunteered by Pruett—to have been a close friend of both the *Flamingo's* owner and his daughter. It seemed unlikely to think that the girl would be unaffected by the tragedy; that she would have left port without learning some of the circumstances surrounding the affair.

The girl seemed to be in high spirits. The report of the murder in *Calle Huerfanos* could not have reached her, although Meech recalled that the morning newspapers had contained a brief account of it. Evidently Miss Newberry had not read them.

"What're you afraid of?" Korry asked at length. "Seems to me, in an emergency, you could take Brant's measure."

"Sure! I did it once," the other responded. "I was just wonderin'," he added, "if maybe the cutter's already been tipped off to watch for us? Maybe the tip went out yesterday."

"Not likely! And if it'll relieve your mind any," Korry went on, "we'll make sure."

"How?"

"Wait for the cutter to show up; that's how. We'll be sighting her somewhere out of Key West."

Meech gasped. "Goin' to run the risk?"

"No risk," the skipper answered calmly. "We'll be standing well outside the three-mile limit. That Federal bunch can't touch us even if they knew we were running monkeys. If the cutter passes us by with just a friendly signal, we'll have nothing more to fret about."

"And if she trails us?" the engineer suggested.

"Why, then we'll show her a clean pair of heels and turn our passengers into prisoners. Simple enough, isn't it?"

"Well, it listens that way," Meech

agreed in a tone devoid of any great enthusiasm.

CHAPTER IX.

ACTORS ALL.

So far as Brant was able to discover during his casual observations, there were three men in the *Flamingo* crew beside Captain Korry. The engineer, whom he had heard addressed as Meech; the cook, a diminutive Cuban, apparently understanding little English; and a third individual who seemed to have nothing at all to do.

The last two men did not look aggressive to Brant; but the engineer, to whom he took an instant dislike, and Korry himself, gave Brant food for thought. He did not underestimate the odds against him, and he realized that Meech and the captain would prove formidable antagonists in a hand-to-hand encounter. Only by a ruse, by pitting his wits against them, could he hope to come off victorious.

Sitting beside Miss Newberry, in an easy-chair under the gay awning astern, he communicated the result of his observations to the girl. Assured that they were beyond possible eavesdropping, the conspirators planned their approaching campaign.

"We mustn't bungle things at the start," he said guardedly. "In case the revenue cutter shows up——"

"It will," she broke in significantly.

"You mean you warned them?"

The girl nodded. "Early this morning. I sent a wireless."

That surprising bit of information failed to meet with Brant's approval. "It may complicate matters," he told her. "Don't you understand? If the cutter shows up and trails us, Korry will instantly suspect what has been done. He can get away easily enough. You told me the *Flamingo* could outrun——"

"But we won't give it a chance," she broke in quickly. "You can surprise and hold Korry—compel him to slow down or stop. I'll keep the other men below deck."

Brant stared at the girl. "Holy mackerel! Is that what you've in mind? Why, it's foolhardy and——"

"I told you it was a hundred-to-one chance," she interrupted to remind him.

"It isn't even that—not the chance you've proposed. So long as the cutter is in sight, Korry won't venture within the three-mile limit; and the government officials have no jurisdiction beyond it. Don't you see?" Brant explained patiently. "Why, even if the revenue agents came aboard and found us loaded with Chinamen, they'd be helpless. A Chinaman isn't contraband on the open sea.

"I'm not an experienced sea lawyer, Miss Newberry," he added; "but I've heard a powerful lot about the three-mile limit in respect to rum running, and I imagine the same restrictions apply to this brand of smuggling."

The girl looked her disappointment. "I hadn't thought of that," she admitted.

"Besides," Brant went on, "how would I be expected to take Korry prisoner? I've nothing more deadly on my person than a pocketknife and a fountain pen."

"I've a revolver in the pocket of my skirt," she told him. "I'm not afraid to use it. Here is the key to a locker under the bunk in your stateroom. You will find an automatic and some cartridges there."

"That's more encouraging," Brant returned. "If you'll excuse me a moment I'll investigate."

He went below and came back presently, giving his companion a cheerful nod. "Found it," he said.

Brant felt more confident with a loaded automatic in his coat pocket; but his mind was still uneasy. The prospect of the Federal boat looming up and giving chase to the *Flamingo* seemed far from inviting. When Korry had evidence that his ruse had been discovered, his passengers would find themselves in a cheerless predicament.

The long, brilliant afternoon passed with unclouded skies, smooth water, and the slow, not unpleasing, roll of the boat. An occasional ship loomed up to be viewed expectantly; but each one sailed on. Once an airplane soared far overhead, Havana-bound. Brant watched until it had become a speck against the distant clouds.

At length a slim lighthouse, that marked

the shoals beyond Key West, grew distinct against the horizon; gradually the coral keys became visible. The *Flamingo* had covered seventy miles in less than five hours. The skipper held unerringly to his course.

Countless palm-fringed islands, with their shining strips of white beach, began to spring up magically, like dark-blue clouds floating between turquoise sky and water. Flocks of sea gulls and pelicans, on the trail of fish schools, swarmed into view at intervals, filling the air with discordant cries. An occasional porpoise, its body glistening in the sun, disported playfully off the bows of the yacht.

It was a picture distinctly foreign to Brant's world, and he watched with interest the changing panorama over the rail. His thoughts drifted from the speeding stage on which he was assigned to play a part. The fascination of the mystery-hung keys, the antics of the birds, the sparkling green-blue water, and all the alluring charm of tropic splendor held him entranced.

The spell was broken suddenly when Meech appeared, emerging from the engine room to squat on the hatch amidship and roll himself his inevitable cigarette. Brant shifted his glance and watched the newcomer from under the down-tilted brim of his cap.

For a time Meech sat like an image with the cigarette hanging between his lips, either ignorant of, or indifferent to, the scrutiny of the passenger. Presently he snapped away the cigarette and lifted his head. Brant, instantly on the alert to account for the action, followed the man's gaze.

A boat had appeared unexpectedly off the *Flamingo's* port bow. It had not been visible a few minutes before. Brant judged that the craft must have shot out from behind one of the nearest keys.

Intuitively, Brant stiffened. The boat was still too far away to be recognized, but he was convinced of its identity and purpose. Spurred into activity and alive to the situation confronting him, he was filled with apprehension.

Miss Newberry, turning guardedly in her chair, voiced that which already was uppermost in his thoughts. "It must be the Federal cutter," she whispered.

Brant nodded. "Remember!" he warned. "We're at least five miles offshore. There's nothing to do but sit tight and wait. Any action on our part now will be fatal. Let Korry make the first move."

Expectantly they watched the approaching vessel, aware that upon its action rested their future. It came obliquely toward them and at a lively clip. If both boats held their present courses, the newcomer would pass astern of the *Flamingo*.

Meech slipped down from the hatch and sauntered aft, hands thrust in his pockets. Apparently he wished to take up a strategic position in the stern and command a full sweep of the deck.

Brant realized the significance of the move, but neither he nor his companion dared betray unusual interest or arouse any suspicion in the minds of Korry or his furtive-eyed engineer.

Minute by minute the boat approached. That it was the cutter was now unmistakable, for a businesslike gun was mounted forward of her pilot house, and a group of duck-clad sailors lounged along the rail.

The *Flamingo* did not change its course. Korry stood at the wheel, silent and, so far as Brant could judge, wholly unperturbed. He did not seem interested in the approach of the government boat.

The cutter bore down to within a few hundred yards of the yacht, then swerved slightly. A friendly whistle sounded, and was answered courteously by the *Flamingo*. The sailors waved a greeting.

Brant and his companion sprang to their feet and waved in return, unable to account for the performance, yet quick to realize that the vigilant Federal craft intended to pass them unchallenged.

Apparently satisfied at identifying the *Flamingo*, the cutter bore on south, her powerful screws leaving a turbulent wake astern, her flags snapping in the breeze.

Turning at length, Brant met the girl's dumfounded and questioning glance. But more relieved than he cared to admit, he smiled.

"Luck's with us," he murmured.

"What do you make of it?" she asked, puzzled, when the cutter had gone a considerable distance.

"Your wireless probably miscarried," Brant answered. "Either that or the cutter captain's a shrewd man," he added thoughtfully.

"Shrewd?" the girl repeated.

"Yes. He's probably been playing at this game as long as Korry; ought to be just as clever, too."

"I don't understand," she persisted.

"Neither do I; but we may learn something of the plot long before the *Flamingo* reaches Tampa."

They moved forward along the deck to where Korry stood back of the wheel. The skipper glanced up at the approach of his passengers and favored them with a smile. On this occasion, the smile was far more genuine than the girl and her companion imagined.

"Wasn't that a government boat that just passed us?" Brant queried innocently.

"Revenue cutter," replied Korry.

"What's it doing out here?" Brant decided to maintain his naïve attitude. "Looking for booze runners?"

"Undoubtedly!" the skipper returned in a matter-of-fact tone. "That and other things."

"I thought at first, from the way it approached, it intended to overhaul us."

Korry's smile broadened. "Probably would have," he admitted, "if the *Flamingo* wasn't known in these waters."

"So that's it, eh? Because the yacht bears a good reputation the officials pass it up. Well, if I had known that," Brant went on, matching the skipper's smile, "we might have brought up a choice cargo of imported goods and run them through without risk."

Korry's face remained as changeless and unreadable as a mask. Whatever disquieting thoughts may have crossed his mind or appealed to his grim sense of humor were not revealed. Although he traded in choice cargoes of imported goods, direct from the Orient, the merchandise did not come in bottles wrapped in burlap.

"It's being done right along," he gravely asserted.

"Risky business at that, isn't it?"

"Very!" Korry answered, speaking from experience.

When Brant had strolled off, amused over the play-acting indulged in between the skipper and himself, Meech ambled up to the open window of the pilot house.

The engineer wore a contented grin, doubtless brought about by the unexpected and harmless encounter with the chink runner's Nemesis—the Federal cutter.

"All jake now, isn't it?" he ventured cautiously.

"Looks that way," Korry answered, squinting over his shoulder to where the government boat was far astern. "Your croaking didn't bring much rain."

"Well, I'm not sorry. How much longer before we reach our landin' and put the monkeys ashore?"

"Midnight. Maybe sooner if it stays clear and the agent's right on the job. Everything all right below?"

"Haven't heard a squeak out of 'em," answered Meech.

"Good! Now listen to me!" Korry proceeded to lay down definite and concise instructions that were to govern the future movements of the engineer, the Cuban cook, and the third member of the crew who was referred to as Rambo.

Having listened to and absorbed the wisdom that fell from his skipper's lips, Meech started away, only to stop short and retrace his steps.

"Say, I forgot this," he began, thrusting a newspaper into Korry's free hand. "Found it on a chair a while back. One of our passengers must have brought it aboard. Something interestin' on the front page," he added suggestively.

The skipper found what Meech referred to and scanned the brief account of the tragedy in *Calle Huerfanos*. He looked up swiftly when he had finished. "How'd Dixon get from the patio to where the servant found him?" he flung out.

"That's what I don't savvy myself," Meech answered. "Somebody must have packed him there. For all we know somebody might have been in the house besides——"

"Suppose they could have seen?" Korry broke in, his eyes ablaze with a sudden, ugly light.

"If they did, why are they keepin' quiet?" the other countered. "Huh, them spiggoty cops want to make something big out of it just to get more credit in the end. They sprung this stuff on the paper.

Sure! They're holdin' the servant; and if nothin' likely turns up in the next few days they'll frame him. I know cops!"

Korry shrugged, but ventured no comment on his engineer's theory. He seemed unusually quiet and preoccupied during the remainder of the late afternoon. Meech did not intrude again; nor did the passengers.

The sun went down in the Gulf, sinister and blood-red, drenching the lilac waters in crimson, staining the high-banked clouds that floated across the western skies. The *Flamingo* seemed to be drifting through silent, scarlet depths.

It looked alarmingly prophetic to Brant and the girl who watched from the rail, to Korry, who brooded at the wheel, and to Meech, who shivered as if in a chill wind when he crept on deck to light a cigarette.

CHAPTER X.

NO TIME FOR DREAMING.

A FAIRYLIKE haze of golden twilight settled down upon the vast and placid Gulf. The distant, enchanted keys melted away. The yacht lights came on suddenly, twinkling like fireflies, to be reflected in the water.

Miss Newberry had gone to her stateroom, and Brant, deep in an easy-chair, looked up at the first, faint stars. He seemed half asleep; but in reality his mind never was more active. Before another sun touched the palms and sandy wastes of Seminole land, a part must be played and an unrehearsed performance given.

He had "faked" through many scenes during his checkered footlight career; he was proficient in concealing stage waits and improvising speeches and business when emergencies required it. But now, figuratively standing in the wings before the curtain went up on a real-life drama, and aware that he must make an entrance without the benefit of cues or a glance at the script—without even the assistance of a succoring prompter—Brant realized the difficulties to be encountered if he expected to achieve a creditable performance.

The Cuban appeared on deck with a soft-spoken *"la comida esta servida."* Troublesome thoughts and possibilities had not taken the edge from Brant's appetite. He got up from his chair and followed the cook into the dining room.

Miss Newberry had invited the skipper to dine with them, and Korry accepted, appearing at the table freshly shaven and in clean linen. To Brant, an air of brittle expectancy prevailed during the meal. Although the captain was graciousness itself and chatted on topics of unusual interest, Brant could not shake off the feeling that he and his companion were being watched and toyed with, as a cat might amuse itself with a caught mouse.

For the first time since the voyage had begun, he sensed a pronounced undercurrent of doubt and suspicion—that vague, indefinable sense possessed by the actor who "feels" the mood of an audience almost at the instant of making his entrance.

Apparently, Korry's attitude had not changed toward his passengers, and certainly nothing had happened aboard to arouse his suspicions. Quite the contrary! Yet the feeling persisted. It may have been intuition on Brant's part, or presentiment. Whatever its definition, he was convinced that the skipper had fathomed the situation and was in a position to strike swiftly when the right moment came.

Brant experienced a sense of relief to find himself on deck again and proceeded to tackle one of Korry's cigars. However, he started involuntarily when Meech, appearing noiselessly out of the shadows, proffered him a light.

In the flare of the extended match, Brant studied the engineer's thin features and crooked smile at close quarters. The scrutiny was distinctly unfavorable. The man reminded him of a slinking, treacherous creature, dangerous when cornered, but preferring flight to fight in the open.

"Belong in Havana, do you?" Brant inquired, when the match had been extinguished and the man's face was confused with shadow.

"Me? Not much. I'm from New York. Gettin' back as quick as possible, too," Meech added. "Don't want no more of the spiggoty country for mine."

"I've been an exile myself," Brant observed. "Broadway will look good to me again. Going up from Tampa, are you?"

"Sure; from Tampa! Soon's the boat's tied up and I collect."

The engineer melted away again as swiftly as he had come. Brant stepped into a lighted portion of the deck, his hand straying uneasily to his coat pocket where he carried the automatic. He began to wish something would break. The suspense and uncertainty were grating on his nerves. The strain of waiting for the curtain to go up made him restless and jumpy. Even danger itself was preferable to the continued inactivity.

The *Flamingo* pushed on with undiminished speed. According to the captain, Fort Dade would be sighted by noon and Port Tampa reached a few hours afterward. The haze that followed twilight had long since cleared, and the big stars shone down with a silver radiance. In less trying circumstances, Brant would have been more appreciative of the tropical night splendor.

Later, he found a chair beside the girl, and the two conversed guardedly. By ten o'clock, although his mind was still active, his eyelids began to feel heavy. More than once he caught himself dozing off. He discovered, too, that his companion had become quiet, or answered him in drowsy monosyllables.

The significance of that alarming predicament dawned upon him—prodded him into action. He reached over and tapped the girl's arm.

"Feel sleepy, do you?" he inquired.

"I can hardly keep awake," she answered, passing a hand across her eyes. "Can't understand what's come over me."

"I'm in the same fix. It isn't hard to figure out. That coffee we had! It was doped!"

Miss Newberry aroused herself with a low exclamation. "Doped?" she repeated. "Yes; that must be it!"

"This will never do!" Brant returned. The thought that they had fallen ready victims to so simple and efficacious a ruse filled him with rage and chagrin. "Come on!" he urged, taking his companion's arm. "We must keep moving."

They walked briskly around the deck, fighting against the insidious lethargy that threatened to engulf them. The exercise helped a little; but Brant realized that something more strenuous must be indulged in if they were to stay awake. Sheer will power alone would not combat the effects of whatever drug had been given them.

Captain Korry had plotted well in the carrying out of his bold and nefarious scheme, Brant reasoned. Doubtless he had preferred to administer a sleeping powder to those who might interfere with his program, rather than take more extreme measures. It would avoid trouble and spare him the necessity of turning his passengers into prisoners. The *Flamingo* would stop at its prearranged rendezvous, discharge its cargo of Celestials, and proceed to Tampa. The thing was simplicity itself, unless Brant and his companion were prepared to frustrate it.

Having revealed to the girl what passed through his mind and made her aware of the disaster that threatened them, Brant asked permission to look over the yacht's store of medicines. He found a well-stocked cabinet below deck and, from the assortment of bottles, selected the restorative he was after.

It occurred to him that a judicious amount of strychnine sulphate might counteract the effect of the drug they had unsuspectingly swallowed. At any rate it could scarcely do more harm, and the occasion demanded a desperate treatment. He took three of the triturates and urged Miss Newberry to follow suit.

The remedy seemed to have a good effect; but to ward off suspicion, they yawned ostensibly in the presence of Meech, who, lynxlike, prowled the deck. By eleven o'clock their drowsiness was less pronounced, and they felt more cheerful.

Miss Newberry went forward to bid Korry good night with the declaration that, by the way she felt, she intended to sleep until the following noon.

Korry laughed and intimated that salt air and a comfortable bunk were certain cures for insomnia.

On the way to her stateroom, Brant laid down certain instructions which the girl was to follow. "Put out your lights," he warned; "but keep moving. Douse your head in cold water if necessary. Lock your door, and in no circumstances open it unless I knock three times."

Following the girl's example, Brant

chatted a few minutes with the skipper, showed that he was very sleepy, listened with grim tolerance to Korry's remarks as to the somniferous properties of sea air, and strolled toward his stateroom, leaving word to be called at dawn.

"Want to see the sunrise," he said, as if to explain the reason for his early call.

He did not lock the door of his cabin; but after a suitable interval he extinguished the lights and stood before the open port, grateful for the cool breeze. He still felt drowsy and knew the instant his head touched the pillow he would be in dreamland. However, he did not propose to stage a bout with Morpheus; his fighting powers were to be reserved for more materialistic antagonists.

His room was on the starboard side and he knew the lagoon-studded Florida coast ranged in that direction, provided the *Flamingo* had not changed its course. For hours, it seemed to Brant, he remained at the open port, his eyes fixed expectantly for the first glimpse of palm-fringed shore. At intervals he moved briskly about in his stockinged feet and performed strenuous exercises to keep his blood circulating and his mind alert.

No sounds reached him from the deck above. The purl of the water as it swept alongside the boat, and the monotonous throb of the engines, alone broke the silence.

When his watch indicated an hour past midnight, and Brant was beginning to wonder, if after all, Korry proposed to land his cargo before morning, a perceptible change in the droning regularity of the engines became instantly apparent. No land was visible beyond his stateroom port, yet he was certain that the yacht had reduced its speed.

He was still puzzling over that situation, when a creak, as of a step in the corridor outside his door, warned him of an unexpected quandary. Acting on the thought that some one might enter the cabin to make certain of its occupant's comatose condition, Brant crawled hurriedly into his bunk and pulled the blankets up to his chin, concealing the fact that he was fully dressed.

Scarcely had that bit of business been executed, than Brant saw his stateroom door open cautiously. A head appeared. It resembled Meech's. He watched through half-closed eyes, every muscle taut; watched and waited for the next scene scheduled in the *Flamingo* drama. His bunk was in shadow; but the door and some distance beyond, were bathed in the dim starlight that streamed through the port.

With a noiseless, catlike tread, Meech moved across the floor to the bunk. In that brief interval, as the man approached him, Brant decided upon a strategic plan of action. The opportunity was favorable now to put one of his four prospective opponents hors de combat. The yacht was slowing down, the landing rendezous must be close at hand, and the moment for striking never more propitious. To open hostilities with a surprise attack upon the engineer was not ungratifying.

Meech tiptoed stealthily to the edge of the bunk, where Brant, continuing to play well his part, simulated the heavy breathing of a drugged sleeper. Apparently satisfied that the passenger was dead to the world and beyond brewing trouble, the engineer turned away.

Brant was upon the man instantly and before Meech realized what had happened, before he could utter more than a strangling gasp of surprise and amazement, Brant's fingers were about his throat and he was flung back across the bunk.

Now Brant was possessed of an average courage that at times might have been considered foolhardy, and while he never considered himself a scrapper, he usually managed to give a fair account of his prowess when circumstances required. While it is seldom chronicled, ofttimes a lowly Thespian, who treads the boards instead of the gridiron or the roped arena, is endowed with a normal, husky physique and a straight-from-the-shoulder wallop.

Meech was no weakling, but the surprise attack took him at a disadvantage. Yet in spite of that handicap, he put up a heroic struggle to free himself from Brant's relentless grip.

Desperately he kicked and squirmed with all the power of his lithe body, clawing at the fingers that were gradually

choking him; but in the end his strength failed, and his muscles relaxed. Brant's fingers had achieved their purpose.

Swiftly, dexterously, Brant trussed his victim with looped and knotted bedclothes, completing his task by using a pillow slip for an improvised gag. That accomplished, he rolled the man into the bunk and covered him with a blanket, assured that, without help, he could neither escape from the cabin nor raise an alarm. The struggle and resultant capture had been of brief duration, and, what was perhaps of equal importance, accompanied by a minimum of noise.

CHAPTER XI.

A QUESTION OF TIME.

FOR a moment Brant stood back, flushed with his efforts, but in no way discomforted. He felt primed to overcome all further obstacles, although what to do next was still a problem. However, the odds against him had been reduced by one, and that in itself gave him greater confidence.

He became aware now that the yacht's engines were barely turning, and looking through the port, he made out a near-by shore line. Grotesque palms, touched by the magic of the stars, lifted their feathery heads against the sky. The narrow strip of beach was dazzling white. Yet no one was in sight; no sounds came from the drifting yacht or the beach beyond.

Presently, as Brant continued to survey the peaceful scene, a point of yellow light gleamed; then it advanced, flickering on and off among the trees like a will-o'-the-wisp. He decided that it was a man with a lantern who was coming toward the beach.

Evidently the *Flamingo* had arrived at its landing place. Brant realized he had not begun his work any too soon.

With his automatic out and ready for whatever emergency threatened him, Brant cautiously opened and peered from his door. The narrow corridor was deserted. Now that the engines had ceased to turn, the yacht was wrapped in silence.

Foot by foot, eyes and ears alert, he crept along the corridor to Miss Newberry's stateroom. Reaching it, he gave the prearranged signal. To his relief, the door opened instantly. He saw at a glance that the girl was alert and ready, doubtless warned of the impending crisis by the stopping of the boat. With a few whispered words he explained what had taken place in his own territory.

"Some one tried to get in here a moment ago," the girl told him. "I heard them fumbling at the doorknob."

"Probably Meech," he replied.

Abruptly, cutting short their whispered conversation, a stealthy footstep sounded in the corridor. Brant guessed that some one had come below to account for the engineer's prolonged absence.

"It's either the cook or that other chap," he asserted, his lips close to the girl's ear. "We'll have to settle with him. It's not likely to be Korry. He'll be superintending matters on deck."

The footsteps came nearer and seemed to hesitate outside the stateroom door. Brant and his companion waited expectantly, pressing themselves against the wall, when, from the new sound, it was apparent that the newcomer was guardedly turning the doorknob.

The latch clicked audibly, and after a moment of silence the door began to open inch by inch. A man's head appeared in the opening—a head that even in the dim light Brant recognized as belonging to the Cuban cook.

Without hesitation or compunction, aware that more than his own safety depended upon quickness and dispatch in dealing with the chink runner's accomplices, Brant lifted the heavy automatic and brought it down upon the unprotected and unsuspecting head.

The cook uttered a grunt and pitched forward, his fall checked by Brant, who shot out an arm and caught the limp, sagging form. The new victim was dragged into the stateroom and the door closed. Precautions similar to those taken before, when Meech had played the leading rôle, were observed. Securely trussed and gagged, the Cuban was rolled unceremoniously into the bunk and left to undisturbed slumber.

Brant chuckled. "This is easy. One crook strangled and the other crowned. Reminds me of some of the comedy films I've seen," he added lightly. "If we can get the other two villains to come

down one at a time our little melodrama will be finished."

For perhaps five minutes the so-far successful conspirators waited in the stateroom, before the hope that a third member of the crew would venture below in quest of his companions was dispelled. Thereupon Brant, somewhat impatient at the delay, could wait no longer.

"You remain here," he said. "Keep your door locked, and don't venture out until you hear me call."

"I intend to go with you," the girl declared.

"Not much!"

"But I didn't ask you to join me and assume all the risk," she insisted spiritedly.

"I haven't assumed any, so far," he replied. "Why, it's been like knocking over ninepins with a ball. No; you remain right here. I can't let you go," he added sternly.

"Very well," she answered in apparent resignation. "I'll remain here—for exactly five minutes. No longer! And whether you summon me or not, I'm coming on deck."

Unmoved by persuasion, and assuring Brant that she intended to play more than a super's rôle in the forthcoming drama, Miss Newberry won her argument. Brant had to admire her attitude, even though he feared the consequences.

He let himself out into the corridor, but did not venture on his way until he heard the door locked behind him. With the knowledge that the girl would be reasonably safe inside the stateroom, and comforted by the expectation that before the expiration of the allotted five minutes he would be in command of the boat, Brant mounted the companionway and crouched warily in the shelter of the hatch.

From where he huddled, under cover of the friendly darkness, he could make out the shore, scarcely a hundred yards beyond, and the dim outlines of a broken wharf whose piles extended for some distance in the star-reflecting waters. The man with the lantern had vanished.

Lifting his head cautiously above the top of the hatch, Brant scanned the starboard deck. Two figures were visible, leaning over the rail forward of the pilot house. One of them he at once identified as Korry; the other was put down as the fourth member of the crew.

The inactivity aboard and beyond the yacht surprised him, and for an instant he wondered if the cargo had been landed. After a moment of reflection, however, he quieted his fears. The landing of the yellow men would have been attended with more or less noise; and he had heard nothing. In fact the boat had been stopped less than ten minutes. He reached the conclusion that some unforeseen hitch had interfered with the smuggler's program.

The delay, however occasioned, was fortunate for Brant. It had permitted him to reduce the odds against him, to plan his final bit of activity.

The two men forward had to be taken care of. That accomplished, the *Flamingo* drama would be well past its crucial act, and as the stage manager he would be ready to ring down the curtain.

After a deliberate survey of the scene and the forming of some vague plans, Brant crept from the shelter of the hatch, ducked around to the port deck, and edged his way toward the bow. Having previously removed his shoes, his stockinged feet made no sound.

As he drew near to the pilot house, his side of the deck wrapped in shadow, fragments of a low-pitched conversation between Korry and his satellite reached Brant's ears.

"You can wade 'em ashore from here all right," Korry's companion was saying. "No use waitin' any longer."

"Don't like to make so much noise," the skipper protested. "Them monkeys hate water, and in spite of all we can do they'll raise a devil of a clatter when they go splashing across. No; soon's Meech comes back we'll lower the dinghy."

"Seems to me Meech is takin' a long time below deck," the other growled.

"Just thinking that myself," Korry agreed.

Brant, crouched in the shadows, heard the men move away, and the conversation that followed became inaudible. He dropped to the deck and wormed himself along between the bridge and the lounge amidships.

Looking up guardedly, he found himself within six feet of where Korry's companion, astraddle the deck rail, was fumbling at the tarpaulin that covered the high-swung dinghy. Korry himself was some distance below, his back to the operations, obviously interested in matters astern.

Brant resolved upon a swift and daring coup. If either of the men ventured below deck and found their hapless companions, the situation would be perilous. It was a contingency to be forestalled.

Cautiously he brought himself erect. When the man beyond, balanced precariously on the rail, had raked in the tarpaulin and was on the point of lowering himself to the deck, Brant stepped forward and delivered a swift blow. His doubled fist caught the unsuspecting man below the ear. With a grunt of surprise he lost his balance, waved his arms helplessly in mid-air, and went overboard with a colossal splash.

Instantly ignoring him as one more adversary eliminated, Brant whirled. Korry, apparently startled by the noise, turned about at the same moment; but it was to find himself covered by a leveled automatic in the hand of his passenger.

"Keep your hands up, please!" Brant ordered crisply. "I haven't had a rehearsal with this firearm, and it may go off without warning."

Amazed at the unforeseen appearance of his presumably drugged passenger, but at the same time entertaining a wholesome respect for the weapon that was leveled at a vital section of his anatomy, the skipper obeyed instructions.

In the water alongside the yacht, which must have been of unexpected depth at the point in which he toppled, the capsized individual was floundering about like a hooked tarpon, indifferent to the hubbub he created, and apparently more intent upon keeping afloat than in reasoning out the cause of his predicament.

Confident that the man was for the present beyond rendering assistance to his leader, Brant confined his attention to the bigger game he had trapped.

"Sorry to interfere with your plans, Korry," he said, "but Miss Newberry and I decided that running contraband in the *Flamingo* was a highly objectionable pursuit. So in spite of the dream-producing powder you thoughtfully administered at dinner, I managed to get up before sunrise and declare myself."

Korry, rapidly regaining his scattered senses, and being not inexperienced in facing what seemed to be disastrous circumstances, eyed his captor with insolent belligerency. Doubtless it was galling to one of his particular activities to find himself thwarted by an insignificant, smiling youth.

"Put up that gun!" he commanded. "What's the meaning of this—this tomfoolery? Do you think——"

"Quite often," Brant cut in. "In fact I've done considerable thinking before and since leaving Havana. It's too late to bluff now. We've dug up the whole plot, Korry, that began with your conniving with Captain Pruett and wound up with the episode in *Calle Huerfanos*."

Whatever unpleasant thoughts played tag through his mind, Korry's face remained inscrutible. "Drop that gun and talk sense!" he snapped impatiently. "You're not acting in a play. If you don't behave you'll find yourself in trouble. My men——"

"Your men have troubles of their own, captain," Brant interrupted. "Meech and the Cuban cook are taking a nap below deck, and I imagine the chap that went overboard a moment ago isn't in condition to obey orders. So you see what you're up against."

Before Korry could find words suitable to express an unflattering opinion of what his captor had revealed, Miss Newberry emerged from the hatch. She stood, a slender figure in the misty starlight, and gazed wonderingly at the scene before her.

Brant greeted her with a smile. "Are the five minutes up?" he inquired. "Good! You're just in time to take a hand in the finish. Suppose you investigate Korry's pockets! It'll be safer all around when he's disarmed."

Unafraid, and without hesitation, the girl obeyed, the result of her search being a large and formidable revolver, which she tossed to Brant. Then, while she covered the prisoner, Brant proceeded to make use of a convenient coil of rope.

A few minutes later the chink runner, except for a gag, which was not at all

necessary, was rendered as helpless as his confederates below deck.

"There!" Brant exclaimed, stepping back to survey his handiwork. "It's all over but the shouting. We'll let Korry do that, if he's in the mood."

Miss Newberry, her eyes alight, came close beside Brant, her hands resting upon his arm. "You're splendid!" she breathed softly. "I never realized all the dangers involved when I asked you to join me."

"Why, it's been a lark," he assured her. "I've come off as scatheless as the proverbial movie hero."

"What became of the fourth man?"

"He conveniently fell overboard." Brant stepped to the rail and scanned the placid water between the yacht and the shore. "Out of sight now," he added.

"Look!" The girl pointed shoreward. "I thought I saw some one running off through the trees."

"Probably you did," returned Brant. "Our friend must have an inkling of what's happened and decided to vanish. Can't blame him. Wonder if there are others ashore?" he went on meditatively.

"If Korry was to land his cargo here," the girl said, "some provision must have been made to run them inland. I don't know exactly where we are; but a road follows the shore as far south as Caxambus. We must be close to it here."

"That would mean wagons or flivvers and several accomplices," hazarded Brant. "They may be strolling this way, too. No sense of us mixing with them or being used for targets. It might be a wise plan if we weighed anchor and started off. Know how?" he inquired.

"It wouldn't be the first time," she replied.

"Well, you'll find me pretty much of a greenhorn when it comes to starting an engine or handling a boat; but I'll be right on the job to follow your instructions."

Having made a decision, the anchor was lifted, the engines started, and Miss Newberry took the wheel. Fortunately the lagoon was wide and deep and the tide high. In half an hour the *Flamingo* with its new crew in charge was out in the broad Gulf, her prow, breasting the gentle swells, headed southward.

They hugged the shore. It was merely a question of time before they picked up the cutter.

CHAPTER XII.

AN UNSUSPECTED PERIL.

SECURELY bound, Captain Korry lay huddled beside the bridge. No word of protest had come from him during the hurried preparations for sailing; nor did he lift his voice once the *Flamingo* was under way. To all outward appearances he accepted his defeat with a Spartan philosophy and was resigned to the inevitable penalty that awaited the signaling of the Federal cutter.

Whimpering or railing against the vagaries of a career devoted to constant lawlessness found no place in Korry's lexicon of life. He ever flirted with danger and did not shrink from the consequences it often entailed. Stoically he faced disaster.

Dawn came across the sky with all its splendor of rose and gold and pearl. The near-by shore became a fairyland of rainbow color that hovered mysteriously between sky and water. Myriad birds appeared on every side—screaming gulls, whistling snipe, and silent, grotesque pelicans. Snowy herons, majestic in their flight and resembling figures on a Japanese screen, winged their way above the treetops.

The glory of a new and radiant day touched the shimmering Gulf and caressed the trim white yacht that sped across its depths.

The two conspirators watched the ever-shifting scenes in appreciative silence, forgetful of what had passed and perhaps indifferent to an unsuspected peril that menaced their conquest. They were far too absorbed in the magic of the glittering east, with its retinue of birds and trailing robes of color, to keep a vigilant eye upon the mist-hung deck behind them.

Korry, however, who had no eyes for the beauties of that particular dawn, saw that which was of far greater significance and comfort. A relieved smile hovered about his lips. Good luck had ever attended him in the past. It did not seem ready to desert him in the present hour of trial.

The *Flamingo* sailed on as the day brightened, and the fiery ball of the sun mounted into a cloudless sky from behind the tall, feathery crowned palms. The early mists vanished, and the water became crystal clear, splotched with turquoise and jade and all the alluring shades between.

Brant bestirred himself. "Perhaps I had better take a look at our friends below," he suggested at length. "Don't suppose they are any too comfortable. Ought to remove the gags."

"You might prevail upon the cook to brew some coffee," the girl suggested, turning to smile upon her companion.

"Yes; I might," he returned. "A bit of breakfast wouldn't be unwelcome."

On his way aft, Brant stopped in front of Korry, whose placid countenance and resigned air seemed to indicate an untroubled spirit. It was so marked that Brant was forced to admire his prisoner who could face a dismal future uncomplainingly.

"You don't look at all downcast this morning, captain," he observed jocularly.

The chink runner favored his captor with a bland, inscrutable smile, but did not seem moved to make reply.

Brant passed on with a shrug. Any number of questions were on his lips—questions that he felt certain Korry could answer, particularly those concerning Dixon; but, after reflection, he decided to postpone the interview until Meech had been visited.

The *Flamingo* engineer, who seemed to be in the smuggler's confidence, might be tempted to reveal valuable evidence, provided it brought him hope of clemency.

Brant turned to descend the narrow companionway that led to the stateroom corridor below. Halfway down, blissfully unaware of the disaster that awaited him, his legs were encircled and wrenched from under him. The thing happened with such amazing swiftness that he was unable to cry out a warning to the girl at the wheel.

Instantly, so it seemed, he was sprawled upon the corridor floor. His head crashed into something that might have been the toe of a heavy boot. In the uncertain light, dim forms pounced upon him; a none-too-gentle hand was thrust against his mouth to prevent an outcry; fingers clawed at his throat. Fists, leaping out of the darkness, pommeled him brutally; and while he kicked and squirmed and fought desperately against overwhelming odds, his wind shut off and his brain reeling, the curtain of oblivion descended with a crash.

Yet an instant before his mind ceased to function, it flashed to Brant that, in some inexplicable manner, the Chinese had broken from their quarters and intended to take possession of the ship. In no other way could he account for the disaster that had overtaken him.

He came back to the world again with a throbbing head and an aching body. One of his eyes was swollen shut, but the other opened wonderingly in the bright sunlight of the *Flamingo's* deck. His first thought was for Miss Newberry. He tried to rise, but his hands were lashed behind him and his ankles bound. With an impatient exclamation at his helpless predicament, he rolled back and closed his good eye from the hot glare of the sun.

When he next peered forth through half-closed lids, it was to stare uncomprehendingly into the grinning, wolflike countenance of Meech. The engineer broke into a malevolent chuckle.

"Huh, awake, are you? Took a long time about it."

"Where's Miss Newberry?" Brant demanded at once.

"Oh, she's restin' comfortable in her stateroom," Meech answered. "The captain's took her trick at the wheel for a spell. Tried to put something over on us, didn't you?" he added.

"Tried? Guess I succeeded, didn't I?" Brant retorted.

His mind cleared rapidly, and he twisted his swollen lips into an unflattering smile. Rage and protestation would avail him little, he reflected, bitter at the thought of his undoing. Yet he was relieved to learn that the girl had escaped his fate.

"How did you get loose?" he queried, seeking to account for Meech's presence. Evidently the Chinese had not broken from confinement as he first suspected.

The engineer grinned and nodded

toward a man standing near the bridge. Turning with difficulty, and surveying the figure, Brant recognized the man he had pitched overboard.

"You thought you'd left Rambo behind when you sailed off," Meech condescended to explain for the benefit of his prisoner. "But you didn't. He got hold of a rope trailin' astern and managed to pull himself aboard. Rambo knew what was stirrin', all right."

"I see," Brant admitted dismally, when the situation was accounted for. "He released you and the cook; then the three of you laid for me in the corridor. I remember something about that. I thought for a minute the whole pack of Chinese were out and mistook me for a bowl of chop suey."

"You worked fast while you were about it," said Meech; "but you got careless too soon."

"So it would seem," the prisoner agreed. "I thought the show was over; but there happened to be an epilogue I didn't expect."

"There's a lot of things comin' off you ain't expectin'," the engineer hinted ominously, his hand caressing a throat that still bore traces of Brant's fingers. "I got a bill to collect myself."

The prediction did not alarm Brant. He managed to worm himself into a more comfortable position, with his back propped against a coil of rope. It gave him a full view of the deck. He saw Korry at the wheel and saw, too, that the *Flamingo* had not materially altered its course. They were still bearing south at a lively clip.

Meech, squatting on the hatch and rolling himself a cigarette, continued to watch his prisoner with amusement.

"Say, you're a sweet-lookin' bird," he taunted presently. "Don't look so pretty as when you come aboard."

Brant, remembering his bruised face, his swollen lips, and eye that was puffed shut, ventured to remark that he felt as sweet as he probably looked.

"What brought you on this trip anyway?" Meech demanded. "Was you plannin' to double-cross the girl? You don't bear the earmarks of a hijacker. Maybe you're a Federal agent. Which is it?"

"I don't know what a hijacker is," Brant admitted.

"I'll bet you don't!" Meech broke into a jeering laugh. "And maybe you don't recall trailin' a man one night in Havana a couple o' weeks ago and gettin' bumped for your trouble, eh?"

Brant eyed the engineer speculatively. "Oh, so you're responsible for that?" he observed, surprised.

"Maybe," the other answered evasively.

Brant pondered over the unexpected disclosure. During the intervening silence Korry strolled up, Rambo having relieved him at the wheel. He stood looking down at the prisoner, his black eyes smoldering with undisguised rancor and malice.

"I been tryin' to get some dope out of this bird," Meech remarked.

"No use troubling yourself," Korry returned. "I got him hooked up with too much now. He can talk or not. Bluffing won't get him anything."

There was a significant note in Korry's voice that set Brant's thoughts traveling along a new course.

"Hooked up?" Brant repeated, pondering over the expression the smuggler had used.

Korry shrugged. "Birds of a feather!" he sneered. "Guess you understand, don't you?"

"I'm beginning to," admitted Brant.

"I'd about decided I was a little off in my reckoning when we sailed according to schedule and the cutter passed us by; but I changed my mind soon enough when I got a look at the newspaper one of you brought aboard."

It was not difficult for Brant to imagine what particular item in the Havana *Post* the skipper referred to.

"You and Miss Newberry's played a smart game," Korry went on, when it was evident his prisoner had no comment to make; "but it's got you nothing."

"Hasn't it?" Brant countered.

"No; nothing but trouble. I'm landing my cargo just the same," the smuggler boasted. "It's a five-thousand-dollar job. I know enough to keep my eyes open. Do you suppose I'd let a show actor and a girl put the blinkers on me? Not much!"

Brant did not take the trouble to argue the matter.

"After I'm done, the girl can do as she likes with the *Flamingo,*" Korry went on. "I don't figure to take the boat into Tampa; not this trip. It would be a waste of time."

Just what disposition was to be made of his prisoner, the skipper failed to reveal; but at the time Brant was far too absorbed in a new problem to permit the omission to disturb him.

Among other things, the realization came to him that during the period of his unconsciousness, his clothes had been searched. And he remembered that the message written by Miss Newberry and addressed to Dixon was in his coat pocket—thrust there just before his companion and himself had fled from the house in *Calle Huerfanos.* Moreover, he recalled that the inclosure was no longer blank.

Just what it contained, he had not presumed to read; but that it would interest Korry in no small way was a certainty.

The smuggler's reference to birds of a feather was no longer puzzling. It was evident that Korry considered his passenger a Federal agent—one of Dixon's subordinates.

The skipper, watching his prisoner narrowly, seemed to read what passed through Brant's nimble mind; and as if to confront him with the evidence and bring matters to an issue, Korry produced the pink-tinted envelope.

"Recognize this, do you?" he queried.

"I would—naturally," Brant replied, "since you removed it from my pocket."

"The envelope is addressed," Korry went on; "but I don't get the meaning of the blank sheet of paper inside."

Brant stared incredulously at the folded letter that Korry removed from the envelope and held up for inspection. The sheet was blank—on both sides; as blank as it had been once before. Yet the last time he had looked upon it, the paper contained a message—a closely written page in Miss Newberry's hand.

Korry doubtless attributed Brant's silence to a cause far removed from the truth, although he might have pondered over the amazed look that stamped itself upon the prisoner's countenance.

"I guess this hooks you up all right," the smuggler declared. "I don't need any more evidence. Miss Newberry gave you the letter to deliver to Dixon. You didn't do it, did you?"

"What makes you think that?" Brant inquired.

The mystery of the letter, whose written message appeared and disappeared at most convenient times, baffled him; but in the present crisis a more salient problem intruded itself.

"We found this in your pocket, didn't we?"

Brant smiled at the deduction the other had made. "There would seem to be more than one riddle to solve," he ventured. "For instance, Dixon was murdered at the door of the patio; but the servant found him on a couch in the living room. How are we to account for that?"

Korry's eyes narrowed. "Why should we?" he countered quickly.

"The servant done it!" Meech put in.

"No. It wasn't the servant," said Brant, his measured glance traveling from Korry to the engineer.

"How do you know it wasn't?" Meech demanded.

"Dixon was murdered at least two hours before the servant appeared," Brant replied. "The police can prove that."

"It don't matter when he was killed or how the body was moved," Korry remarked with professed indifference.

"Doesn't it?"

"Say, what're you gettin' at?" the engineer snarled, glaring at the prisoner. "How come you to know so much?"

"I happened to be on the scene the night before last," Brant answered quietly. "I delivered Miss Newberry's message; but I took it away with me later. I was in the house before and after Dixon was murdered, and I carried him from the patio where he was struck down."

A sneer twisted Korry's lips, but he gave no evidence of the shock he must have experienced. In sharp contrast, however, a look of apprehension swept Meech's countenance.

"Why didn't you notify the police?" Korry asked.

"Because that would have interfered with the sailing of the *Flamingo,*" Brant returned pointedly.

The chink runner seemed to flinch. "How so?"

"You know well enough. Death prevented Dixon from fulfilling an important engagement; but I volunteered as an understudy. The *Flamingo* was scheduled to sail, I did not want to hinder it."

"What do you think you saw?" It was Meech who spoke. He leaned forward, breathing hard.

"Dixon opened the door in answer to the bell," Brant replied in a tone that conveyed the impression of being on the scene. "As he did so, a man stepped inside. The thing happened in a flash. Dixon swayed and dropped. The visitor whirled and vanished. The patio was but dimly lighted, yet——"

Korry broke into an insolent laugh, cutting short Brant's graphic recital. "What's the answer? You've learned nothing."

"You're wrong!" Brant returned. "I know who murdered Dixon. That's the answer!"

Before either of the men could frame a reply or act in the crisis that Brant had precipitated, the man at the wheel uttered a warning cry.

Korry whirled swiftly. Rambo was pointing ahead to where, far in the distance, a vessel loomed in the bright sunlight. Instantly alert at the new danger, the skipper bounded across the deck.

A moment later, having studied the approaching craft through leveled binoculars, Korry cried the alarm: "It's the cutter! Look alive now!"

The smuggler himself took the helm, while Rambo and the Cuban crowded to the rail.

Meech, apparently indifferent to the unpleasant news, slipped from the hatch and bent a glowering face upon Brant. "Say, you're a wise guy, ain't you?" he snarled. "Like to crow about it! What you think you seen ain't goin' to travel far. You won't get a chance to squeal. I'll see to that!"

Undaunted, Brant's eyes searched the distorted and forbidding countenance that was thrust close to his own. His mind was no longer in doubt. He was comforted by the thought that what he had set out to do had been achieved.

"You're a ready man with a knife, aren't you, Meech?" he charged. "Far too talented to remain at large. I've a suspicion that the finger prints on the patio door——"

Meech interrupted with a snarling imprecation. He drew back his arm and crashed a savage fist into Brant's face. It was a vicious blow that hurled him flat upon the deck. He heard the man swear again and again, then move off to where Korry was bawling orders.

CHAPTER XIII.

WITH THE ODDS AGAINST HIM.

DAZED by the cowardly attack and unable to protect himself, Brant lay outstretched upon the deck, his eyes closed against the hot, brilliant sunlight. When he had in a measure regained his senses and found strength to look about him again, it was to note that the *Flamingo* had changed its course and seemed to be heading toward the maze of islands off her port bows.

The thought reached his benumbed mind that Captain Korry did not propose to outrun the cutter, but intended to seek protection among the mangrove keys. The shallow draft of the yacht made it easy for the skipper to navigate through the tide run and over shoals where the Federal boat dared not follow.

Still in contemplation of Korry's able strategy, and wondering what the end would be—for the situation loomed favorable for the chink runner—Brant was startled at hearing his name called. The low-pitched voice belonged to Miss Newberry; yet it seemed to issue from the deck itself.

Guardedly he turned his head to survey his immediate surroundings. Korry was engaged at the wheel. Meech had gone below. Rambo and the Cuban were standing at the rail near the bridge, their attention centered on the approaching vessel. Temporarily, at least, the prisoner was neglected.

Again the voice sounded—louder and more insistent. Brant's roving eyes promptly traced the familiar voice to its source. The roof of the cabin amidships projected a foot or more above the level of the deck; and in that narrow space were small, hinged windows of wire glass, to afford added ventilation.

It was at one of those open windows,

surprisingly close at hand, that Brant discovered Miss Newberry. By standing on the edge of her bunk below, the girl's eyes were slightly above the line of the deck.

"Are you all right?" he inquired eagerly, worming his way toward the narrow window and thrilled at the nearness of his companion.

"Perfectly!" she answered. "I've been watching you for some time, but dared not call to you in order to attract your attention."

"Then you heard?"

"Yes." Her voice quivered. "It was Meech—not Korry—who murdered Dixon. I'm glad we know now."

Brant nodded. "He practically confessed."

"I saw him strike you," the girl went on quickly. "Oh, it was revolting! If I could only get out! They've locked me in here—took away my revolver. We must do something."

"We must!" Brant echoed. "It's our last hope. I may be rolled overboard any minute. Meech won't take chances of my escaping him now. Korry and his crew are desperate. They'll never let us stand in their way if the remotest danger threatens them."

"The cutter! Is it in sight?"

"Has been for some time. Coming up from the south."

"What will Korry do?" she asked.

"Escape this time," he answered. "He'll run no more chances. Perhaps the cutter's received your message; but at any rate, when they see we're trying to avoid them, they'll give pursuit."

"Barring accidents, the cutter'll never overtake us," the girl declared. "What can we do?" she entreated.

"Have you a knife in the stateroom?" Brant asked quickly.

"I believe so. Wait!" Her face vanished. When she again appeared her eyes were shining. "I've a small knife; but it's sharp!" She held it up for his inspection.

"That'll answer," he said, explaining what was to be done.

After a look about him to make certain he was not being watched, Brant wormed himself into a sitting position, his back against the low cabin roof, his bound wrists suspended in front of the window.

"Don't cut clear through the rope," he warned. "Leave a few strands intact. Just enough that a jerk will break them."

The girl worked swiftly at her task. "It's done," she whispered at length.

The knotted rope about his ankles presented a new difficulty; but after maneuvering patiently, his eyes ever alert to avoid attracting attention, Brant got his legs under him.

Screened by his body, and stretching her arms to the utmost, the girl managed to reach out and all but sever the cords. She was compelled to work slowly and with infinite caution owing to the awkwardness of her position and the fear of discovery; but in less than a quarter of an hour the thing was finished.

The task never could have been done had the *Flamingo* crew been alert, had they given the slightest attention to their bound prisoner. Their interest and concern, however, were directed solely upon the menacing cutter that threatened their safety. To a man they sensed what capture meant and wasted no time in watching a presumably bound and disheartened prisoner.

Breathing easier now, his mind occupied with a host of rash plans, Brant saw that the Federal cutter had gained on its quarry. It had altered its course in an endeavor to head off the *Flamingo;* but the situation was still in Korry's favor.

Brant realized that at once. He could depend upon no help from the authorities. The yacht was too swift and its skipper too adroit. Once beyond the dead line of islands the chink runner could laugh impudently at Federal pursuit.

Presently, when the cutter was still far off their starboard, the *Flamingo* slipped like a frightened hare between the emerald keys, following an unmarked channel that must have been familiar to the skipper at the wheel.

Around them now reared countless islands, whose shores presented impenetrable thickets of mangrove roots that twisted snakelike into the water. The Gulf was lost behind them. After the yacht had swung through narrow, crooked

channels, avoided sand bars and reefs, threaded silent and mystic coves, Brant lost all sense of direction.

At times the trees met overhead, and the boat swept through cool, leafy tunnels where birds screeched complainingly; again the yacht emerged abruptly into wide lagoons where the sun glare was blinding and the water lay like a mirror.

"What are you going to do?" the girl asked at length. "You've no weapon—nothing with which to defend yourself."

"I've a likely pair of arms," Brant said. "That's more than I had a few minutes ago," he added thankfully.

He glanced about him for a possible weapon, but saw nothing that could be used except a fire extinguisher suspended near by. He resolved to make use of it in case of emergency. The thick, brass tube might be wielded to advantage at close quarters. Yet he realized that his enemies were armed and would not hesitate to shoot at the first sign of trouble.

Now that the *Flamingo* had gained a refuge, thanks to a resourceful skipper, and the fear of pursuit was lessened, the engines were throttled down, and the tense excitement that had prevailed among the crew abated.

It was a danger signal for Brant, however, for he realized that with comparative safety assured them, Korry and his malevolent followers would sit in judgment of their superfluous passengers. That prospect was far from comforting.

"Can't you get out of your stateroom?" he asked presently.

"I've tried desperately hard," the girl answered. "The door is locked on the outside, and I haven't strength enough to break it down. I'm afraid to make too much noise. It might put me in greater danger."

"Yes; that's right. So long as you're quiet, you'll probably be safe. Bolt the door on the inside."

"But you?" she protested. "You're still in great danger! It's maddening to think of staying here—helpless—while you——"

She left the rest unsaid, but her fingers stole out and found his hand. He thrilled under their warm, grateful touch.

"Never mind," he returned quickly. "Everything will work out all right in the end. It's bound to!"

Miraculously, Brant forgot that he was battered and tired and weak from hunger; that every muscle in his body ached and every joint creaked alarmingly when he moved it; he forgot his swollen, half-closed eye, his bruised lips, and disfigured countenance. Sustained by a look and touch and knowledge of solicitous concern for his welfare—danger, peril, and even lingering death itself lost their terrors.

"It's all my fault!" the girl wavered, her eyes abrim with unashamed tears. "I brought you into this."

"I wouldn't have had it otherwise," he assured her earnestly. "And it couldn't have been otherwise," he went on, stirred by a cheering recollection. "It's written in the stars. Robust adventure! That's what they predicted. That's what has come to pass. And I was to reach a wintry old age! That's in prospect. So you see?"

Miss Newberry made an effort to smile at his gay chatter, and her fingers tightened upon his hand.

Although Brant maintained an optimistic spirit and spoke reassuringly of the future, he did not underestimate the precariousness of the situation confronting him. Once more the odds were overwhelmingly against him, yet at the moment he would not have changed places with any of his acquaintances along New York's Broadway, or crawled out of his predicament in exchange for a big contract and his name in incandescent splendor above Forty-second Street.

Strategy and an abundance of good luck had helped him to victory in the past; but circumstances were different now. Still that did not dim his shining assurance.

CHAPTER XIV.

A DESPERATE EXPERIENCE.

THE *Flamingo* sped on across the sapphire waters of uncharted lagoons that reflected, mirrorlike, the leaning palms and the dense green tangle of jungle thicket and the flaming flowers. An occasional egret winged aloft, and great armies of fiddler crabs scuttled across the exposed sand bars.

The world about them was saturated with a deadening, oppressive heat, for no breeze from the Gulf tempered the secluded, inner recesses of that silent region bordering the Everglades.

The deck became a scorching furnace. A pitiless sun beat down upon Brant's unprotected head, adding to the misery of his cramped and aching limbs. The heat seemed to fester his open wounds; a consuming thirst blistered his parched throat. Still he did not complain, or indicate by word or look his torment.

Brant's restless eyes, shifting about, alighted suddenly upon a crumpled bit of paper that had been tossed upon the deck and lodged against a coil of rope near at hand. It recalled to mind the one bit of mystery yet unsolved.

"Look there!" he whispered. "Your message! Kerry found it when he searched my pockets."

"Yes," the girl answered. "I was watching when he confronted you with it."

"The thing is bewitched," Brant said. "It's a blank sheet of paper to-day. Two nights before, when I removed it from Dixon's table, it contained a message in your handwriting. What magic have you used?"

"The writing is still on it," she told him; "but it can be read only under a certain light. Mr. Dixon gave me the prepared ink, which is used for official communications. He urged me to use it in case I wished to send a message."

The phenomenon was accounted for; the mystery dispelled. "I remember that Dixon held the letter under a lamp when he read it," Brant said, his thoughts drifting back to the house in *Calle Huerfanos*. "I recall now that the light was of a peculiar hue, but I attributed it at the time to the shade. Of course the envelope was addressed with ordinary ink."

"I didn't think to explain this to you before."

"I intended questioning you the night we fled from Dixon's house," Brant said. "I couldn't figure out why you didn't want the police to find the message. When I looked at it after my affair with the man who tore open the envelope, the paper was blank. But when I picked it off the table I saw it was covered with writing. The thing baffled me. Now I understand. The lamp was on the table, and under its light the message was visible."

A silence fell between the two.

Presently Brant spoke again. "What a part the message has played in our little drama," he remarked musingly. "It brought us together; it was responsible for Dixon's passing; and it's given no end of trouble to Korry. If I shouldn't see you again"—his voice grew wistful—"I'd like to get and keep it as a dear remembrance."

The girl did not answer him, and Brant did not trust himself to turn; but her fingers caressed his hand with a gentle tenderness that bespoke more than words and filled his comforted heart to overflowing.

Hours later, so it seemed to Brant, the *Flamingo* glided into a quiet, sheltered bayou. A bell sounded faintly below deck, and the throbbing engines ceased their labors. The forward anchor was cast out, splashing noisily.

It aroused Brant from his rose-tinted dreams and brought him back to earth again as his air castles tumbled softly down.

"Watch out!" he warned the girl. "Keep away from the window! They mustn't suspect!"

He twisted about, changing his position to ease his cramped limbs, moving carefully for fear of disturbing the nearly severed bonds. The unexpected awaited him, but he faced it with unfaltering courage. Whatever the end he would meet it—on his feet and fighting.

Presently Meech lurched into view from above the engine-room hatch and squinted toward the shore, mopping at his sweat-beaded face. He cast a sharp, malicious glance at the prisoner, but did not approach, probably because Korry already had started aft.

"Goin' to land the monkeys here?" Meech inquired, when the chink runner had come within earshot.

"Soon's I find Thatcher," Korry answered curtly.

Much to Brant's surprise and relief, the men ignored him. He lay back on the hot deck, his eyes closed against the blistering sun, his arms doubled under him,

a picture of abject helplessness; but his ears were alert, and they absorbed the talk that went on about him.

Korry was frankly outspoken and made no attempt to conceal the nature of his plans. The skipper knew precisely what he wanted done and had steered a course for the present rendezvous with a definite purpose in mind.

Brant gathered in the particulars. The smuggler had no desire to meet the Federal boat again. That much was certain.

Half a mile beyond where the *Flamingo* had anchored, Thatcher had homesteaded a key. From fragments of Korry's conversation, Brant learned that the man was an egret hunter, guide, moonshiner, and fisherman, depending upon the season, market, and inclination. He was a friend of the chink runner and often rendered valuable services when occasion required.

Back on the squatter's premises, on the mainland, a road existed that led into Caxambus. Korry intended to wade his Chinamen ashore, pilot them to Thatcher's, and keep them there until the smuggler's agent, farther up the coast, could be informed of the change in plans.

"We're not more than ten miles by land from where we anchored last night," Korry declared. "And we ain't over two miles from the Gulf, taking a channel just above here. But we're out of sight of the cutter," he added. "I'll have Thatcher take his boat and deliver word to my agent, who's probably wondering what's happened to us. Before night he can bring down the cars and pack off the monkeys."

"They can't be packed off any too soon to suit me," growled Rambo. "Some of 'em look half dead now, stuffed into that hot cabin."

"We'll have 'em up in another hour. Better go down and give 'em some water and smokes. Let 'em know we're landing 'em. You can talk enough of their lingo, can't you?"

Rambo disappeared to carry out Korry's instructions, and the Cuban followed to stir up some grub for the cargo as well as the crew.

"What's happenin' to ourselves?" Meech asked.

"Thatcher'll carry us to Key West. We'll go on home from there," the smuggler answered. "When he gets back he can help the girl take the yacht into outside waters. I'm not wishing her more bad luck. She's had enough."

"What about—him?" Meech jerked a thumb toward the prisoner who, sprawled upon the deck, seemed to be in a stupor of exhaustion from the heat and his brutal treatment. "If he gets free and squeals we'll——"

"Let him stay there!" Korry broke in. "Looks about finished now, don't he? Another day in this sun, and he'll be shaking hands with the angels," the skipper added, chuckling at his own grim humor.

Once more Brant was comforted. The unpleasant sentence pronounced upon him fanned the embers of hope into a radiant flame. Surely the stars were kind to him! If the mutilated ropes were not discovered and Meech did not chose to interfere with plans of his own contriving, the prisoner had little to fear.

"Soon's I get a bite to eat," Korry remarked presently, "we'll put over the dinghy and I'll round up Thatcher."

"I'd appreciate a swig of somethin' stronger than Java," Meech returned. "Seems like——"

"You'll get nothing until we're finished with our job," the smuggler broke in. "When that's done you can celebrate."

Brant heard one of the men walk away and decided that it was Korry; he heard a cautious step approach him and concluded that Meech intended to inspect the prisoner. Yet Brant dared not risk opening his eyes to make sure. So long as he remained quiet, he trusted the engineer would not bother him, or too closely examine the frayed ropes.

The crinkle of paper and the striking of a match indicated that Meech had rolled and lighted a cigarette. Aware that the man must be standing over him, Brant lay inert—a huddled, motionless figure in which life seemed all but extinct.

Without warning, something struck his upturned face and burned into his flesh. By a superhuman effort he endured the pain and did not wince. It came to him swiftly that Meech was amusing himself by dropping the hot ashes from a cigarette upon his prisoner's cheek. Again

and again the performance was repeated; still Brant gave no indication of the torment he suffered.

He heard the man laugh. The sound brought with it an all but overwhelming desire to snap the unsecure ropes that bound his wrists and ankles and leap upon his cowardly torturer.

Korry's voice, lifting abruptly in the silence, put an end to the punishment. Brant heard Meech growl an imprecation and walk away.

"Ahoy there, Thatcher!" the chink runner called loudly and repeatedly. Running feet sounded along the deck; querying voices were raised from different parts of the yacht.

Brant risked opening his eyes. The vivid sunlight dazzled him at first; but gradually, like a picture coming into focus, he made out the objects near at hand and those beyond.

His attention was held by the sight of a man who crawled along the white beach and began to wade into the shallow water. The stranger seemed to be ill or in distress, for he waved his arms and shouted feebly; and all at once he staggered, plunging headlong into the bayou.

Korry loosened the tackle that supported the dinghy, and when it was overside he dropped into the boat and rowed swiftly toward the floundering man. Reaching him, the smuggler drew the man into the boat and pulled back to the yacht again.

With the help of Rambo and Meech, the newcomer was lifted on deck and placed in a chair. Korry produced a flask, and the man partook greedily of its contents. After that he collapsed.

Although some distance from the scene, Brant readily perceived the man's deplorable condition. His ghastly, splotched face, bloodshot eyes, and an ugly, partly healed wound on the side of his head, testified to a desperate experience. Torn and soggy fragments of what had been shirt and trousers clung to his emaciated body.

"By all that's holy, Thatcher," Korry exclaimed, shaking the man's limp arm, "what's happened to you?"

The man rolled back his head. "Been hidin'—long time—weeks," he choked. "Too sick and hurt to get—far. They almost finished me. Got Luke. Saw him floatin' down the channel. Sharks tearin' him."

"They?" queried the smuggler. "Who?"

"The—the pigtails."

"You mean chinks?" Korry cried, falling back a step. "Attacked you? Where're they come from? Damnation, man, speak out!"

Thatcher shifted in the chair. Apparently the stiff drink had taken effect, for when he spoke again his voice was firmer and his words more coherent:

"I come back from Caxambus—one afternoon. There was a dozen—a dozen crazy chinks runnin' over my place. When I got ashore they—they fell on me—like devils. I couldn't drive 'em off. They beat and hacked me. All the time they was screamin' and gibberin'. Guess they thought I was dead; but in the night I crawled off. I been hidin' for days. Don't know how I done it—alone—nothin' much to eat and——" Thatcher's voice trailed to a whisper and became inaudible.

It remained for Meech to grasp the significance of the harrowing adventure. "Say, them chinks!" he broke forth, whirling to confront Korry. "They must have been the cargo we dumped ashore a couple weeks ago! Near here, wasn't it?"

"You? You was it?" Thatcher lurched from his chair, a gaunt and terrible figure. "You turned loose them—them crazy monkeys?" His voice lifted to a shrill scream. "You done that when—when you knew my place was here?"

Korry brushed aside the hands that reached for his throat; gave Thatcher a shove that sent him crashing back into the chair. "What did you suppose I'd do?" he snarled. "Cut their throats and dump 'em overboard? The cutter had me trapped! It was a case of protecting my own interests first."

Meech gazed down at the writhing, babbling fisherman; then glanced nervously toward the smuggler. "Say, I don't like this," he began, his face drained of color. "We——"

Korry silenced him with an oath. "Don't like it?" he jeered. "Well, who does? Hard luck; that's all. Never saw its equal! I've been cursed ever since you hooked up with me!"

Meech shrugged and stepped back as if in fear of violence. "Them chinks are ravin' crazy by now," he cried. "Crazy from hunger and wanderin' about. Don't want to meet any of 'em."

"Bah! They're like a bunch of chickens. Thatcher didn't know how to handle 'em. They'll be all right in a day or so. I'll round 'em up pretty soon and send 'em North with the cargo we got below."

Thatcher lay limp and ominously quiet in his chair, his head bent, his arms sagging. A merciful oblivion had come to his rescue, soothing his wracked body and blotting out the terrors of the past.

Korry ordered him taken below and looked after. Meech and Rambo carried the man down the companionway and left the smuggler alone on the deck.

With passive countenance, Korry stared over the rail toward the sun-drenched beach beyond, apparently unmoved by what he had seen and heard, indifferent to the frightful revelations, untouched by misgivings. That an act of his had left death and ruin and suffering in its wake seemed to rest lightly upon his shoulders.

CHAPTER XV.

THE GREATEST OF ALL.

THROUGH astounded eyes, Brant had taken in the whole of the dramatic scene staged upon the *Flamingo's* deck. His active mind had grasped the explanation, had pieced together the details left unspoken.

Korry's stowaways, marooned on a former trip and turned into savage animals by their suffering, had descended upon Thatcher's island home, stripped it of rations, struck down those who sought to interfere.

The Cuban brought up a steaming pot of coffee and a tray of sandwiches, and the chink runner, wholly undistressed, devoured his belated breakfast. He neither mentioned nor inquired after the man that had been taken below.

Meech appeared shortly, but seemed to prefer a cigarette to the food that was offered him. He leaned against the cabin roof, his eyes shuttling back and forward, taking in the length of the beach that extended in a wide crescent beyond the yacht.

TA 4A

A quarter of an hour passed with scarcely a word exchanged between the skipper and his crew. Then suddenly, galvanized into action, Meech bolted erect, his panicky voice startling his companions.

"Look! Look yonder!" he cried, pointing toward the shore.

Korry turned with a scowl; but apparently he saw nothing. "What's troubling you now?"

"Look! I seen 'em! The monkeys!"

The smuggler continued eating. "Bah! You're seeing things. Get some grub into you. You're going to need it."

"There! Look! Three of 'em!" Meech cried again.

From his position on the deck opposite the men, Brant guardedly lifted his head, confident that for the moment he would not be under observation. What he saw, framed in the open space between the rails, sent his blood coursing swiftly and brought disturbing conjectures tumbling into his mind.

A half dozen, bare-headed and ragged Chinese were splashing out from shore toward the yacht, shouting as they advanced, their thin, naked arms waving, their distorted yellow faces gleaming in the vivid sunlight. Back of them, others appeared, until the water seemed filled with charging, gesticulating figures.

Meech uttered a frightened shout, jerked a revolver from his pocket and began firing. The nearest of the advancing horde screamed, flung up his hands and went out of sight; but others took his place, wading waist-deep in the suddenly crimson-dyed waters.

Korry turned upon the engineer with an oath and wrenched the smoking gun from Meech's hand. "None of that, you fool!"

Meech rolled over on the deck from the vicious impact of the smuggler's fist; lay there with twitching limbs and hands that clawed at the air. Rambo and the Cuban, undecided what to do, shrank back against the roof of the cabin.

The Chinamen came on like a remorseless flood, the water up to their shoulders, their gaunt faces fixed upon the man at the rail. Korry waved to them, called in a friendly tone. It had no effect. The yellow forms struggled nearer.

Korry blanched. The avenging creatures he had marooned and lied to seemed to have recognized him. He launched into blasphemy.

"They're crazy!" he gasped. "Keep 'em off!"

The smuggler began firing with a cool and deadly accuracy; yet while the water reddened with foam and bobbing heads went under, others seemed to take their places. The Chinese were swimming now, partly submerged and scattering as if resolved to surround the yacht. Korry continued to fire until his revolver jammed; then he snatched Rambo's weapon, ordering the man to go below for ammunition.

Brant watched the grim and terrifying scene, no longer considerate of his own predicament, but faced with dread consequences of a common fate. He struggled erect to his knees and jerked at the bounds that confined his wrists. They refused to part. A clammy perspiration enveloped him at that alarming discovery.

Either he was too weak to break the all but severed ropes, or Miss Newberry had failed to cut them deep enough. Breathless from his futile exertions, he ceased struggling and gazed about him. At that instant he saw Meech and realized that a more deadly predicament confronted him.

The engineer had crawled to Brant's side of the deck, and seemed prepared to jump overboard, doubtless seeking to escape the fate that awaited his companions. Abruptly he saw Brant; saw that the prisoner was on his knees and struggling to free himself.

Meech stopped in his tracks. For a moment undecided, he whirled suddenly and picked up the revolver that Korry had knocked from his hand a few minutes before.

Instantly aware of the man's grim purpose, and spurred by desperation, Brant put forth all his strength. The ropes snapped. He flung himself headlong at the crouching engineer as the lifted revolver spouted flame. A hot, tearing agony numbed his shoulder; but unmindful of the pain he closed upon the man, bore him to the deck, hammered him with a blind, unreasoning ferocity; and when Meech at last lay quiet, his mashed and bleeding face upturned to the sun, Brant wrenched the revolver from his victim's limp fingers and staggered to his feet.

Already some of the frenzied Chinamen were climbing aboard the yacht and tumbling over the rails like gibbering monkeys. Korry was reloading his revolver. Rambo had picked up an oar and was swinging it mightily.

As Brant whirled to meet the yellow foe, a new sound reached his ears. From below deck came a roar of voices, a crash of splintering wood, shrill cries. He realized that the cargo of Chinese, alarmed by the noise and the shouts of their countrymen, had broken the door of their prison and were stampeding through the corridor.

Alive to the new danger, and prompt to frustrate it, Brant leaped across the deck to the companionway, slammed down the hatch and bolted it. Rambo screeched something in his ear; but Brant did not hear.

A half-naked coolie hurtled from the rail. Rambo swung at him with the oar, missed and sprawled helplessly upon the deck. Brant fired point-blank at the onrushing Chinaman, who screamed, animal-like, as he crumpled upon the cabin roof.

Almost instantly, it seemed, another yellow man loomed up and flung himself upon Brant. His revolver clicked on an empty chamber. Both men went down with a crash and rolled along the deck, clawing at one another until brought up against the rail.

There, finding himself uppermost, Brant used his revolver as a club and smashed the heavy butt against his foe's skull. Breathing thickly, his brain reeling, he got unsteadily upon his feet just in time to see Korry go down in the locked arms of a tall Chinaman. Yet before he could go to the smuggler's rescue, another of the yellow foe closed upon him.

Brant flung him off, but in the struggle, the revolver went spinning. Unable to find it, he tottered across the deck to where the fire extinguisher hung, tore it from its fastenings, and used it as a deadly cudgel upon the skull of the nearest enemy.

He heard Korry scream and staggered forward to where a powerful, infuriated

Chinaman had the smuggler pinned upon the deck. Once more Brant swung his formidable weapon. The stout brass tube descended, flashing in the sun, and the yellow man crumpled without a sound.

Brant leaped back, prepared to meet another savage onrush, but none came. He glared about him in the silence, unable to account for the lull. Then he laughed weakly, foolishly, and fell against an overturned chair, a red mist curtaining his eyes. He felt weak and sick and tired.

A shout reached him as if from a great distance; and when he turned his head and fought down the giddiness that threatened to engulf him, he saw a dinghy, crowded with jackies, rowing frantically toward the yacht.

He lifted an arm and waved; then sank back again, wondering where the men had come from. Objects about him began to blur. He closed his eyes.

"Hello, there!" A voice floated to his ear, and a hand touched his shoulder. "Still alive, are you?"

Brant's eyes snapped open to see the deck with its crumpled figures, the bright sunlight, and a uniformed man who bent over him.

"Sure! I'm still alive," he responded.

The officer from the cutter grinned admiringly. "Some battle—from the looks of things," he remarked, turning from the fight-scarred survivor to scan the *Flamingo* deck. "Sorry we couldn't get here before."

Brant passed a hand across his eyes as if to sweep away the mists that dimmed his vision. He seemed unable to account for the arrival of the newcomers.

"Where—where'd you drop from?" he asked, puzzled.

"From the cutter," the other responded. "We couldn't follow you in here, but we managed to keep close to shore on the outside. We spotted Korry in this territory before and figured he'd repeat the performance. Good hunch, wasn't it? We must have been half a mile off when the shooting began. That was what guided us here."

Brant's mind began to clarify. His roving eyes drifted to where several jackies had lifted Korry from the deck. The chink runner was growling and protesting, but seemed too weak to make much trouble.

"Guess Korry has handled his last cargo," the officer remarked. "Seems a trifle battered; but he'll live to serve a few years of the sentence that's coming to him."

"Don't let that engineer get away," Brant spoke up quickly, pointing to where Meech, still groggy from his recent encounter, was attempting to crawl out of sight. "I've got something charged against him—something worse than running monkeys. A whole lot more to tell yet," he added; "but it'll have to keep."

"Plenty of time," the other observed. "Sorry that the message from Miss Newberry was delayed. Didn't pick it up from headquarters until long after we'd passed the *Flamingo* yesterday. Of course we never suspected——"

Brant swayed to his feet with a choking exclamation that cut short the officer's sentence. "Miss Newberry! She's locked in a stateroom below! And all the chink cargo's loose. I—I closed the hatch against them a few minutes ago."

With the officer and half a dozen ready sailors behind him, Brant unlocked the hatch. The corridor below swarmed with Chinamen; but they were cowed and frightened now, cringing at the sight of the armed invaders.

Brant stumbled down the companionway, plunged through the quaking Celestials, reached the door of the stateroom and turned the key that had been left in the lock.

"You—you're all right? Unhurt?" he cried anxiously, as the imprisoned girl met him with a tremulous exclamation.

Her arms were about him as he swayed. "Oh, you're hurt! Your shoulder! What was it? Those ghastly, screaming Chinamen——"

"Just—just a little rough-house on deck," he answered, with a brave effort to smile and steady himself. "Sort of lively for a time. Meech got me—in the shoulder. Not bad. But I kept him from making a get-away. Boys from the cutter here now. Better not go up yet. It—it's rather bad."

He sank down on the edge of the bunk, grateful for her supporting arms. He closed his eyes upon a swimming world

and opened them a long time afterward, it seemed, to find the officer standing in the doorway.

"Miss Newberry? Quite all right, are you?" the man inquired solicitously. "Sorry your wireless was delayed. Might have avoided this unpleasant episode. But you are to be complimented. With your help we've put an end to Korry's activities. Means a great deal to us, I assure you."

"It was Mr. Brant," the girl protested softly. "I've done nothing."

"Well, at least you furnished the means of setting the trap," the officer returned gallantly. "We've rounded up the cargo. Twenty chinks! Biggest haul we've ever made. A fortunate thing you closed the hatch on them, Brant. If they had swarmed on deck to take a hand in the affair——" He broke off with an expressive shrug, as if hesitating to dwell upon the consequences.

"Singular thing," the officer remarked in the silence that followed. "This is about the spot where we boarded Korry's boat a fortnight ago. Found he had dumped his stowaways ashore. Gave us the laugh then; but we're having it now. That batch of poor chaps he marooned helped to settle old scores."

Brant heard but dimly, for his thoughts were elsewhere. "Say," he murmured in a voice that was barely audible. "The stars were pretty much all right, weren't they?"

"What's that?" the officer queried, puzzled. "Stars? What's he referring to, Miss Newberry?"

The girl, however, did not answer. She held Brant closely and soothed his aching head, her radiant, tear-dimmed eyes fixed upon him with a new and greater meaning.

Brant smiled happily. Adventure and romance had not been denied him; and with them had come love, the greatest gift of all.

FICKLE APRIL

By Freeman Harrison

YOU fickle minx intractable,
  Pray, why don't you behave?
Your escapades are terrible
  Although some poets rave

In ode and merry roundelay
  About your warmth and glee—
Just how those poets get that way
  Is more than I can see!

You're cool unto the violet
  That seems to trust you so;
You chill the purple martinet
  With winds malapropos;

You smack of winter's nipping ways,
  Pert sprite of cold and squall;
Through thirty, bleakish, freakish days
  You April-fool us all!



The Unlucky Seventh

By Frank E. Carson

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

CAN YOU IMAGINE IT?

WITH a noisy silk handkerchief, Spence Marshall mopped his sloping brow. He then reached for my last cigarette. After that he sighed wearily, but with evident satisfaction. "Well," he announced, "that's handled! Now all we've got to do is get busy."

"Yep." "Slicker" Metz rose leisurely from his seat on the bed and indulged in a yawn and a luxurious stretch. "We ought to clean up on this one, eh, 'Skids?' "

I shrugged my shoulders helplessly. "We ought to," I told him, "but we won't."

For, despite their apparent enthusiasm, my most optimistic view of the latest money-making scheme these two wise crackers had concocted didn't promise a thing beyond the inevitable race between us and the Law and Order Boys. I'd been voicing this opinion all evening.

"Aw, take off the blue glasses," Slick advised disgustedly. "You never can see anything, but the shadows. Why don't you hop out into the sunshine once in a while?"

"I'm leaving that for you guys to bathe in," I snorted. "You're the original little Pollyannas. Somebody's got to stay on the bank and watch for cops, or you'd be in the hoosegow all the time. What say, Spencie?"

That worthy young person's face turned red, and Slicker Metz guffawed loudly at this back-handed reference to a recent unhappy incident. Spence had one unconquerable weakness. He would do funny things with a pen. His latest contribution had been a facsimile of his employer's signature across the bottom of a check, which had netted him fifty dollars at one of Chicago's leading banks.

Friend boss, however, couldn't appreciate the joke and had called in the police. I went over to the station, collected the remnants of the fifty from the frightened culprit, added enough of my own cash to make a refund in full, and persuaded the angry boss not to prosecute. He fired his fancy penman, of course, and I was not sure which Spence enjoyed most—being out of jail, or out of work.

The three of us celebrated the release with a round-table discussion of ways and means for providing the maximum of food and shelter with the minimum of physical and mental effort. The conference occurred in our plainly furnished suite in one of West Madison Street's moderate-priced rooming houses. Out of it had sprung what was frankly conceded, by me anyway, to be one of the craziest schemes ever doped out for separating suckers from their shekels.

Admitting that the modern youth can

learn a great deal by simply clipping the coupon and afterward intelligently studying a good course of instruction, can you imagine him putting in a few pleasant evenings under the living-room lamp and then stepping out on a grass lot and crowding fellows like George Herman Ruth and Eddie Collins for their jobs?

In other words, did you ever hear of a correspondence school that taught baseball? Neither did I, until these two boy friends of mine picked the idea out of a cloud of cigarette smoke and began dusting it off to see what they could do to it.

They did plenty.

The Metz-Marshall Amalgamated Baseball Institute—according to its founders—was going to offer the red-blooded youth of America a golden opportunity to get out of the rut and into the well-paid ranks of professional baseball, to be happy, healthy, and independent in ten easy lessons—results guaranteed or money cheerfully refunded. Spencerian C. Marshall was unanimously chosen president, Adrian S. Metz, vice president in charge of sales and advertising, and Robert T. Reegan—being the only member of the firm who had any money—drew the combined office of secretary and treasurer. Meeting adjourned!

The "Amalgamated" part of the title had been one of Slick's happy thoughts. He admitted being rather hazy as to the meaning of the word, but insisted that it would look fine on our stationery.

"Of course," said Spence, during our initial executive session the next morning, "we can't very well get ourselves chartered or incorporated or whatever it is they do to ordinary correspondence schools, because—well—because——"

"You win!" I interrupted. "We sure can't survive much of an investigation. Furthermore, we want to standardize on equipment and keep it loose and easy to pick up. Something tells me there's going to be times when we'll want to move our general offices and move 'em fast."

"No chance," scoffed Spence. "We're not running a skin game. Our customers are going to get something for their money."

"What?" I asked pointedly.

"Besides," Slick spoke up, ignoring my question, "we're going to get our scholars out in the sticks and what business have them rubes got coming way in here to bring teacher an apple?"

"You can't tell a thing about it," I shot back. "These rubes you're referring to do a lot more traveling now, than they did when you used to be one of them. And you can't tell how many of 'em are going to get all steamed up over being bunkoed again and come driving in here, swinging a hedge knife or a couple of gats."

"Aw, go smoke a pickle!" advised Slick disgustedly. "Your specialty is crossing bridges before you get anywhere near the water."

CHAPTER II.

IT WAS TO LAUGH!

NOTHING short of a downtown address would do for the Amalgamated so, after considerable searching, we found a small fifth-floor room in an old fire trap over on the west edge of the Loop which could be subleased by the month, cheap, from a dying job-printing outfit, if we agreed to give them all our printing business. Slicker closed the deal. According to his chatter, they were going to have to put on three or four more pressmen and a flock of new equipment to handle our business. The frayed-out old party who did the listening, however, had heard that line before, and I had to hit the treasury for a month's rent to make any sort of an impression on him.

Then, just to show how good he really was, Slick went down the next morning and talked our new landlord out of a faded, ink-stained rug and an ancient typewriter. The rusty writing machine came from a scrap pile in the rear of the shop, but Slick lifted the rug right off the floor of the old gent's office. My boy friend was working on a brass spittoon and a framed print of the Brooklyn Bridge when Spence and I came plowing in, ahead of a pair of battered oak desks, with chairs to match, which we'd picked up at an auction down the street.

"What we need now," puffed our worthy president, sinking back in one of the wabbly chairs and fanning himself after the terrific strain of telling me how to arrange our purchases, "is a water cooler."

"Water cooler!" I was in a bum humor, following my exercise with the two desks. "What do we want with a water cooler?"

"For the gold fish to bathe in," Spence answered sarcastically. "Who ever saw a real office without a water cooler?"

"Be prepared for a shock," I snapped, "because you and this 'Whoever' you're referring to are going to see one."

"Oh, all right; if you've got to get huffy about it," flared Spence. "I'm only trying to be modern. A nice water cooler, with a long glass tube full of paper cups alongside it, sure looms up in an office. Makes it look sort of homelike and friendly."

I let out a snort of disgust. "This ain't a Pullman car," I told him, "and it's not going to be a public rest room. Nobody's going to loaf in here, but us three, and if we can't do our drinking out at the sink with the rest of the printers, we're going to be most awful dry. There'll be no drinking fountain in this cave—not with my money."

"Skids is right, Spence," volunteered Slick, from a recumbent position across one of the desks. "Besides, I won't be here much, so I don't care anyway."

By the end of the week, some boy friend of Slick's had finished a sample series of come-on letters, and if this young man wasn't talented, neither was Shakespeare. I became so interested in the third letter that I caught myself reaching for a subscription blank, and by the sixth—the last of the series—I'd have signed anything.

Professional baseball, according to these letters, offered gobs of fame, scads of glory, and a bushel of money to the man who was trained by our new method. Imagine—so read one of the letters—the Polo Grounds, or Braves Field, or Comiskey Park, crammed with excited humanity. Imagine the awed hush which sweeps across this vast throng when you—yes, you, my friend!—stride briskly up to the rubber, swinging your trusty war club.

It's the last half of the ninth inning! There are two men on! Your team needs them both to win! Can you bring 'em in? Can you emblazon your name across the six-o'clock pink sheets of every big city in the U. S. A.? Can you do it, brother? You can!

See page 2 lesson 8. "How to Connect for Extra Bases." Also page 3, lesson 10. "How to Hit a Home Run in An Emergency."

Did you ever—so read another letter—feel the inexplainable urge of ambition? Isn't there some indefinable something way down inside you which tells you that you can be anything you wish—if you will? Of course there is! It's in every one of us. Alas, only a few of us heed the call! "Babe" Ruth did! Ty Cobb, Tris Speaker, Frankie Frisch, Rogers Hornsby did; they answered it.

You, too, my friend, can heed the call. You, too, can answer it with the invaluable aid of our new home-study method which leads you step by step, so simply, so easily, that you're actually at the top, before you realize you've started. All in the pleasant comfort of your own home! Picture the astonished looks upon the faces of your friends when they learn of your power! Just imagine!

The complete course was to cost the scholars twenty-five dollars, if they fell for either of the first two letters; twenty, if they held out until the third or fourth; and ten, if they were still loose at the fifth or sixth.

"Fine!" I congratulated, passing the series back to Slick. "Lack of funds is all that's going to get anybody but a miser past the fourth letter, and number five'll start him throwing money at us. When do we begin distributing these literary gems?"

Slick was rubbing his hands together gleefully at my enthusiasm. "Right away," he replied. "Spence and me were discussing it just before you came in."

"Seems to me that you and Spence do most of your discussing just before I come in, or else just after I go out."

"Nothing like it, Skids! Nothing like it!" protested the vice-president and sales manager, with an assisting echo from the president. "Why, if it wasn't for you with your capital, we wouldn't be here at all."

"I'll say you wouldn't!" I howled. "Spence would be in prison, and——"

"Besides," interrupted Spence, to whom that subject was extremely distasteful,

"you're going to handle all the money that comes in, and we've decided to let you write the course."

"You've decided to—what?"

"Let you write the course," chimed in Slick. "You're the only one of us who's had much experience—and you've got lots more time than we have."

That remark drew the season's biggest laugh out of me. Me write a series of lessons on "How to Play Baseball?" The height of my baseball career was a second-base job with a grammar-school nine, back in the 1890s. It certainly was to laugh.

"Yep," announced Spence, who had maintained a dignified silence throughout my spasm of joy. "We did think of having some star baseball player do 'em, but most of those guys are rotten writers; besides, they'd charge too much."

"So I'm elected!" I gasped weakly.

Both officers of the Metz-Marshall Amalgamated nodded in solemn unison.

"Now get busy right away and dash off something snappy," ordered Spence. "I'll go over 'em—when you've finished —and edit 'em for publication."

CHAPTER III.

"TO ARMS, MEN!"

WELL, I knocked that wheezy old typewriter for five home-study lessons on "How to Play Baseball" in just four days. That's averaging better than one a day. They looked it!

According to our persuasive sales literature, the course was the simplest ever produced. Simple is hardly a simple-enough word. "Dumb" would have been better.

"Don't spend much time on anything past the fourth lesson," Spence had advised. "Statistics show that a big percentage of those who sign up for a correspondence course drop out by the fourth lesson."

So I wrote an extra one for emergencies —and quit. I'd have had to stop there anyway, because I'd said all I knew and plenty I didn't know about how to play the great American game in those five stanzas.

At the end of the next two weeks we had our come-on series printed up, our lessons typed for mailing, some one-inch decoys scheduled for two or three farm weeklies, and Slicker Metz was out, combing the sticks for scholars. Pretty soon we began to get bites from the ads and names from Slick, with here and there a check from some simple youth who'd fallen for Metz's bewitching ways. The money was the welcomest sight of all, because my rainy-day fund was down to considerably less than zero.

Then, in one big rush, the mazuma began to rain down on our unprotected heads. Slicker Metz was going through the middle West like a cyclone through Kansas—with almost as much financial damage to the natives. Those he didn't sign the first time, we knocked off with our barrage of follow-ups; seldom did they fall later than the twenty-dollar ante.

Business got so brisk we had to rent a real typewriter and hire a girl to help Spence mail out letters and lessons, so that I could devote my personal attention to the needs of our growing list of students. Also, despite my strenuous objections, nothing would do but we must take a gold-plated suite in one of the North Shore's expensive boarding palaces and do our walking to and from the office in taxicabs.

Then, almost overcome by the wave of prosperity which was sweeping over us, our traveling representative got homesick and came in to help spend the profits. We showed our appreciation of his efforts by paying as little attention to work as possible and bending every effort toward making his visit a pleasant one.

One morning while Spence and I were sorting the mail for checks, laying the rest of it aside until next week or later, Slick flopped in, all out of breath and just as calm as a fellow who's house was on fire.

"Hey!" he yelled. "Snap to attention! We're gonna have company!"

"The police!" gulped Spence.

"I knew it!" I wailed.

"Not yet!" Slick grinned.

"Who?" we shouted.

"Visitors from the provinces! Two of 'em are imbibers at our fountain of knowledge and crazy to meet the guy who writes those pretty letters. I've got

'em parked downstairs, but they're r'arin' to go and may bust in any minute. To arms, men! To arms! No—wait here!"

Slick dashed madly out. We sat there and looked at each other—and waited.

"Branner's out!" came the announcement from the doorway a minute later, as Slick returned. "Spence, you take his office. It looks better than this mouse-trap of ours, and our president's got to have a real office. Skids, you go on in and be in conference with him when I breeze in with the tourists. We'll glad-hand 'em to a finish and get rid of 'em as soon as possible. Come on; hop to it! Here we come!" He fled downstairs.

CHAPTER IV.

SNAPPY WORK.

WITH a flourish, Slick opened the door of the office. "Gentlemen, I want you to come in here and meet Mr. Marshall, our president," he said.

The enemy was upon us.

There were three in the party. One was a tall, skinny, open-faced rural youngster with a huge Adam's apple and a rubber collar. He was evidently in charge of the expedition. Two sunburned lads who looked interested but uncomfortable stood behind him. The long boy's name was Squires—Elmer Squires—and I recognized it at once as belonging to one of my most diligent pupils.

The trio, according to Elmer, had chaperoned a couple of carloads of hogs to the city from down State and just thought they'd run in and see us, along with a few of Chicago's points of interest.

"Pete and me are takin' your course," he explained. "Lafe is gonna get married next spring and don't care about follerin' up baseball any more or he'd be takin' it, too."

"How do you like it as far as you've got?" asked Spence, after we'd passed out the chairs.

I held my breath.

"Fine!" chorused the two yokels, and I almost fell off onto the floor.

"We're mighty glad you dropped in on us," said our president untruthfully, after we'd all indulged in a lot of sitting and not much conversation. "We're always glad to know our students personally. It—er—gives us the—a personal touch, don't you know."

Spence, not being much of a talker, was falling down miserably on his job as host. Suddenly, however, he displayed a flash of that true genius which makes great men greater. He passed the buck. He passed it directly across the desk to Slick and me. "Sli—er—Mr. Metz!" Spence fingered a pile of our landlord's papers nervously as he spoke. "Will you and—er—Mr. Reegan show the boys around a little while I finish signing these letters?"

Did Mr. Metz dodge the issue? Not so that anybody could observe it. He rose to his feet just as nonchalantly as if showing customers through our spacious class rooms was one of the oftenest things he did. "Right this way, gentlemen!" He bowed, holding the door open politely while our visitors filed out.

If you imagine for a moment that the subsequent excursion through the musty, ink-stained domain of the Elite Printing Company was anything short of a complete success, you underestimate the resourcefulness of Slicker Metz.

"You'll observe that we don't go in for frills and falderals," he began, as soon as we'd stepped into the big, grimy press-room. "We're just plain men who love our work, and we believe in putting our money right back into the course, where it will benefit our students, rather than into fancy offices with pretty pictures on the walls. See that big press over there?" He indicated the largest and dirtiest of the rusty old-timers. "That's a marvelous piece of machinery, gentlemen. Why, that press cost a small fortune, and it'll turn out the finest work that money can buy. Why, that there——"

I frantically tugged at his coat sleeve. "Nix, Slick!" I whispered. "These birds are students, not printing buyers."

"Another thing about our school," veered off my versatile boy friend, "is the fact that we specialize. Specialization, gentlemen, is the word that spells success to-day!" This was a quotation from come-on letter No. 5 to prospective students, as I knew. "We specialize, for instance, upon just one study—baseball. And in offering this one course to our

students, we are, quite naturally, able to bend our every effort toward improving and bettering our course.

"Doesn't that sound logical, gentlemen?" he asked. "Doesn't it seem reasonable to suppose that by specializing—by specializing on just the one subject, we can better serve you than—than—say, a larger school which offers a variety of courses for home study? Isn't it only logical, gentlemen?"

It was, as far as his gaping, spellbound audience was concerned.

"See those men over there?" Our guide pointed toward a far corner, where three of the Elite's four pressmen were grouped around a table and indulging—I think—in a little friendly dice game in the absence of their boss and anything else to do. "Those fellows," said Slick, "are three of our best instructors. They're famous ex-big leaguers, and they're at work right now on an intricate problem in inside baseball which will be passed out to our students in due time. If they weren't so busy, I'd like to have you meet them. They're peculiar, though, like all great men and don't like being interrupted while they're in conference.

"Here," he went on, steering us alongside the fourth member of the Elite staff, who was leisurely grinding off a small job on a battered old hand press, "is one of our expert pressmen turning out a new series of lessons." He wisely rushed the trio along before any of them could take a look at the new lesson. "I'm sorry," he announced regretfully, "that this happens to be a half holiday with us; most of our employees are off duty. I'd like to show you boys how a real organization works."

So the voluble Slick towed the open-mouthed tourists on, stopping here and there to deliver a brief lecture, until we reached the door of our own little cubbyhole. "This," he called out, flinging the door open upon our solitary female employee, who dropped her magazine, swallowed her gum, and started banging out, "Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of their party" on the firm's rented typewriter, "this is our mailing and receiving department. Small, but planned that way for efficiency."

The president of the Metz-Marshall Amalgamated Baseball Institute had discovered a box of expensive-looking cigars—for customers only—among the personal effects of our absent landlord, Mr. Branner, by the time the de-luxe tour wound up. Spence offered them to our visitors with a sang-froid which would have done credit to Slicker himself. Then the three of us started shooing the visitors toward an exit. Mr. Branner might decide to return at any minute.

"Say," the elongated Elmer let out suddenly, when we'd at last got 'em as far as the door, "you might just as well give me lesson six while I'm here! I'm all finished with five, and I been expecting six for more'n a week. It'll save you the bother of mailing it to me."

A sort of a hush dropped suddenly upon the meeting. Lesson No. 6 was one of the things the Metz-Marshall Amalgamated hadn't wasted so much as a single thought on in the past two busy months.

Spence, however, was improving not only as a diplomat, but as a passer of the well-known buck. "Certainly, Mr. Squires," he gushed. "Er—Mr. Reegan"—with a nod in my direction—"would you mind getting Mr. Squires a set of lesson six?"

I had the ball and didn't know what to do with it. "Lesson six," I muttered. "Why, there——"

"Yes; there is," cut in Slicker Metz, passing me a look with daggers sticking out all over it. "We just printed up a new batch yesterday. Come on, Mr. Reegan! I'll show you where they are." When we got outside, he turned on me angrily. "Whatcha tryin' to do? Queer everything?"

"But we haven't got any lesson six!" I protested.

"Course we haven't, you fathead. But can't you be smooth about it? Can't you stall 'em a little?"

"You stall 'em!" I snapped. "It's one of your specialties."

When we returned to our waiting guests, Slick switched his scowl to a beaming smile with all the skill of a vaudeville actor stepping out to take a bow, after growling at his partner for hogging the scene.

"I'm awfully sorry, gentlemen," he apologized, "but Mr. Reegan was right.

We're entirely out of copies of lessons six, eight, ten, and fourteen, on account of the tremendous demands of the past few days. We're going to run some off the press to-morrow, though, and you may expect your set, Mr. Squires, within the next few days."

When Slick told a fabrication, he told a fabrication—there was no question about that.

CHAPTER V.

PICKING AN EXIT.

THE visit of these customers was merely an incident in the lives of my two carefree partners, but it started me to thinking about a lot of things. Our scheme for taking money away from would-be Ty Cobbs was a howling financial success. It was, in fact, a success beyond the wildest dreams of its creators.

How much longer, I wondered, could we hope to get away with it? How long before old John Law, or The Society for the Prevention of Something or Other, was going to walk in on us? How many more of our simple scholars were going to ask for Lesson No. 6? How were they going to get it?

"Well," said Slick, "the only thing I can see for you to do is to dash off another lesson or two. This graft's a cinch, and we'd be cuckoos to quit now."

"Why not you or Spence do the dashing?" I flared angrily. "I'm pumped entirely dry of ideas."

"How about a chapter on umpires?" suggested our energetic vice president. "You haven't said a thing about umpires yet, and you could easily fill two pages with advice on what to say to umpires."

"Sure," spoke up Spence with an airy gesture. "That'd be a snap."

Slick nodded and looked thoughtful. "Why not a chapter on the proper diet for a ball player? Or a three-page lecture on the importance of constant practice? There's dozens of subjects you could frame some stuff on."

"Why don't you write one on poker playing?" asked Spence. "All ball players play poker."

"I've got it!" yelled Slick with a sudden outburst of intelligence. "A lesson on bench etiquette! What to say and how to say it—on the players' bench. That'd knock their eyes out! Thousands of eager young Americans are curious to know just what happens in the dugout during a big-league ball game. You could tell 'em in lesson six. Our students'll show it to their friends, and they'll——"

"What do I know about how they sit or act on the players bench?" I growled.

"What do you know about sliding bases or sacrifice hitting or any of that so-called inside stuff you've been putting out? You don't have to know anything about it. Make it up. They don't know any more'n you do, so it's bound to go over. You'd better be getting busy—there'll be lots more calls for lesson six pretty soon."

"There'll be calls for the blue-suited boys and the wagon before we get out of this deal," I said grimly.

The odds were two to one, however.

Elmer, and the rest of the cash customers who needed it, got his Lesson No. 6, "Big-League Batting Averages and What They Mean." I lifted the averages from the records, and about all they meant was a lot of bother to me in digging them up. Twenty-dollar bills continued dropping merrily into our treasury, and the daily routine of detail work kept our entire operating staff—myself and the female gum-shark—pretty busy. Spence and Slick had their hands full, putting our wealth into circulation.

Whenever I could corral either of them long enough, I voiced a strenuous objection to this easy-come, easy-go policy which they had adopted and foretold the fate which was bound to be ours in the inevitable day of reckoning. I illustrated my lecture with frequent references to Lincoln's very pertinent remark about fooling some of the people all of the time, but not all of them forever. I earnestly urged a financial retrenchment against the day when our twenty and twenty-five-dollar scholars began to wake up to the fact that they'd been buncoed again, b'gosh.

Did my wailings make an impression upon those two high-stepping cuckoos? Just about as much as a six-year-old kid with a toy hammer would make on a battleship's armor plate.

" 'Calamity Claude' now pitching," one of them would call out.

"Aw, forget it," the other would advise with a yawn.

Spence—who had put in an unusually wet evening—reported at the office one day around noon with a startling piece of information. "Say!" he gasped, dropping into a chair and wheezing frantically from unaccustomed physical exertion. "That bird Squires! The bird who headed that inspection trip from the red-mitten belt. I just saw him! He's no rubber-collared rube, that baby! He's a detective!"

A lighted bomb wouldn't have caused any more of a riot in the offices of the Metz-Marshall Amalgamated Baseball Institute.

"Yes, sir; a detective," repeated Spence, who was beginning to get his breath. "I saw him not ten minutes ago—breezing down Michigan Avenue. I hailed a taxi so's to get here quick, but it got caught in a jam on Randolph Street, and I jumped out and ran the rest of the way."

"How do you know he's a detective?" Slick asked, being the calmest.

"I seen his star!" yelled frightened Spence ungrammatically. "His coat's floppin' in the breeze, and the old, tin, law-and-order button blinks right out at me."

"Did he see you?" I asked excitedly.

"No; I saw him first," replied Spence. "And just as soon as I glimpsed that sticker, I beat it for here."

"Well," I said, looking from one to the other of my partners helplessly, "what are we going to do about it?"

"What's the use of doing anything about it yet?" The vice president shrugged his shoulders. "Maybe he's not after us. Did he have on his rube make-up, Spence?"

"I guess so," was the reply. "I saw the star first, though."

"Well?" I turned to Slick, who always assumed the lead in emergencies.

"Well?" echoed Spence.

Then the door popped open, and everybody—including Slick—jumped about a foot.

"Coupla fellahs out here want to see the boss of your outfit," sang out one of our printer friends from the Elite.

"It's him!" gasped Spence. "There was another guy with him."

"Shall I tell 'em you're in?" the printer asked with a grin.

"No!" howled the Metz-Marshall Amalgamated Baseball Institute, as one man.

Fortunately, I'd cautioned our neighbors about letting visitors walk in on us.

"Here; wait!" Slick went into action. He hauled the ink slinger inside and closed the door. "You tell 'em—tell 'em the boss is out of town and won't be back till Friday."

"I'll tell 'em," promised our grinning ally, making his exit.

"The boss ain't here," we heard him announce loudly. "He's out of town and won't be back till Friday."

"Who's that you was talkin' to?" asked a voice with a familiar twang. "I want to see——"

"It's Elmer!" Slick made the door and snapped the catch in one lightning movement. "Beat it!" he whispered, pointing to the window. "The fire escape! Quick!"

It was a long drag down five flights of wabbly, rusty, old steps, but we broke all existing records for the trip and hit the ground running. Down the alley we sped, out onto the street and—luckily—right smack into a passing taxicab with the vacant flag flying.

"Home, James!" yelled Slick at the gear jammer. "And double time if you make it in nothing, flat."

CHAPTER VI.

"GRAB THE STUFF!"

SLICK was first across the threshold of our sumptuous living quarters, and he was immediately busier than a battalion chief at a four-eleven fire. "Grab the stuff!" he commanded, indicating our personal belongings. "Them bloodhounds'll be hot on the scent, and it's our move."

The phlegmatic Spence, with immediate danger two miles in the rear, was inclined to argue. "No use breaking our necks," he grumbled. "Those guys don't know where we live."

"No; but them dicks have got uncanny ways of finding out stuff," snapped Slick, who spoke from experience. "Our ticket reads out, and out we go. How much money have we got in the treasury?"

"To-day's receipts," I grunted, displaying a pair of twenty-dollar checks. "The only reason we've got these is because you birds haven't had time to start working on 'em. A fine pair of cuckoos I've tied up with! We get our mail at Joliet from now on."

"Shut up!" squawked Slick, from the depths of a bureau drawer. "Now," he went on, as we finished flinging the most important of the firm's personal articles into a couple of traveling bags, "you fellows dash out the rear way and check these bags at the corner cigar store. I'll snap out through the front exit with an eye peeled for the dicks. I'll meet you on the corner, and we'll go over to Charley's place and pick up that car he was showing us."

The plan went through without a hitch. Ten minutes later the three of us strolled nonchalantly into Charley's Garage and Automobile Salesroom.

"Will you take a check for that bus now?" Slick asked the proprietor.

"Try me," answered Charley with a wide grin.

"Handle it, Spence," Slick ordered, heading back toward the rear for the car—a big, rejuvenated gasoline eater which Charley had been trying to sell us for a month.

Lulled by the warmth of the afternoon breeze and the steady pur of a sweet-running motor, the retreat of the Metz-Marshall Amalgamated Baseball Institute changed from a riot to a pleasant joy ride. Spence and I lolled comfortably across the back seat of our new purchase, for all the world like a pair of successful brokers en route to the golf club, while Slicker Metz, on the front seat, with a big cigar in his face and the wheel in his hands, was the picture of calm contentment.

"Where away, mates?" he flung back when we rolled out into the parkway.

"West, young man; west," suggested Spence jocundly.

"Yes; just as far west as we can go," I told him.

"California?" suggested our chauffeur.

"Yes; or Cleveland or any of those Western towns," said Spence.

"Cleveland's east, you squarehead," I told him scornfully.

"My mistake," he apologized. "A mere geographical error."

"What route?" asked Slick.

"West Madison Street," I directed, as it was the only street I'd ever been very far west on.

"Personally, I'm glad we're getting out," volunteered my back-seat companion, as we were approaching the bridge into the Loop. "Being in business for yourself is too much of a worry. I'd rather work for somebody else."

"Worry!" I muttered. "You're a fine guy to be talking about worry. A howling lot of worrying you ever did—or Slick either! I'm the little Atlas that's been shouldering our burdens for the past two months. Worry—bah!"

"Slick and I thought of the scheme, didn't we?" parried my friend. "We did all of the executive work, didn't we?"

"Yes; including the spending," I fired back.

"Well, I've got one now that'll make us all rich." Spence flicked the ash from his stogy with a careless gesture. "Now, just as soon as we get to California——"

"Save it," I cut in. "We're not there yet."

"What say we go over past the factory and bid it a fond farewell?" Slick suggested, when we stopped in a traffic pause at Randolph Street.

I jumped to my feet and started protesting so loudly that autoists and pedestrians began to give us the once-over.

"Darn good idea, Slick," called Spence, pulling me back into the seat. "I'd like to wave a good-by kiss at the old place."

"The ayes have it," said Slick, swinging the car around into Randolph.

"You nuts are never satisfied unless you're flirting with the sheriff," I moaned helplessly.

"Crape hanger!" scoffed Spence.

"'Old Doc Kill-joy,'" Slick flung back over his shoulder.

About six traffic cops later, we turned off again and started dodging motor trucks along the street which faced our deceased meal ticket.

"Good-by, old-timer!" Spence removed his hat and half rose to make an elaborate bow in the direction of the ex-offices of the Metz-Marshall Amalgamated Baseball Institute. "Good-b——"

The word choked in his throat and came to an abrupt end. Slicker, too, who had removed a hand from the wheel to wave blithely at our former address, let out a wild cry and pedaled the foot throttle frantically. The car lunged forward with a jerk which slammed its passengers back against the rear seat. In a frightened, backward glance, I saw the cause of the riot.

Elmer Squires, our star pupil, and a short, bulldoggish-looking man were dashing across the sidewalk in our direction. Elmer was waving his arms and shouting something; the stout man was reaching for his hip pocket.

Smash! Crash! Yells from the sidewalk! Twinkling stars! A mass of people that almost smothered me! Voices! Shouts! Commands! Darkness!

CHAPTER VII.

AFTER THE FIREWORKS.

A FEMALE person in a white hat was holding my head up with one arm and pushing a spoonful of something into my half-opened mouth. I was in a bed in a room that had a peculiar smell of iodine and liniment. Completely surrounding me were other beds. I was in a hospital, I guessed hazily, and sank wearily back onto my pillow.

A half hour later, when I was able to do a little looking around, I discovered that the mass of bandages on my left was Spence Marshall, and that the occupant of the bunk on my right was Slicker Metz.

"How'd you like the fireworks?" chirped Metz, who appeared to be the least damaged of the two.

"What'd they do?" I inquired, gingerly patting my bandaged head with a much-wrapped right hand. "Shoot us full of holes?"

"Shoot—blah!" groaned a smothered voice on my left. "That dumb dodo over there tried to make our car climb a cast-iron elevated post."

The nurse busted up the argument which started with an announcement that a gentleman was on his way up to see us.

"Elmer!" squawked Slick, sliding down into his bed and pulling a blanket over his face.

"Too sick to see him!" wailed Spence, burrowing beneath his own covers.

Being pretty thoroughly mummified with bandages and wooden splints, I couldn't do anything; I did not move.

Sure enough, it was Elmer. He approached my bed slowly—with a sort of an awed tread.

"Well?" I shot out defiantly.

The visitor shifted his feet nervously and displayed a huge package that I hadn't noticed before. He coughed a few times and said: "I brought you something."

Unwrapping the parcel awkwardly, he exposed a basket of fruit and placed it on the table alongside my bed. Curiosity had got the better of my boy friends by now, and I caught both of them peeking furtively out at the little drama.

"Thanks," I muttered uncomfortably.

"Hurt much?" inquired Elmer.

"Not much," I answered. "A lot of bruises and sprains, I guess, and a general shaking up."

"I'm awful sorry," he declared sympathetically. "You fellers hit that post pretty hard."

An awkward pause followed. I waited, tense and expectant. The old word "arrest" was due at any time. I seemed due for a shock, however.

"Well, I gotta be goin'," Elmer said at last.

I risked a look, and he was fumbling with his hat. Something was wrong somewhere, or this bird was giving us the kidding of our lives.

"Were you up to the office to-day?" I managed to ask.

"Yes," he answered; "I came up to get lesson seven—I finished six the other day. My uncle was with me, and I wanted him to see your swell school, if you had time to show us around. One of your instructors told me that Mr. Marshall wouldn't be back till Friday, and he said he didn't know anything about lesson seven. We waited around a while, thinkin' maybe you or Mr. Metz would come in, but we got tired waitin' and were just leavin' the building, when I saw you pass in the auto. I waved at you, but I guess you didn't see me. Then you smashed into that post."

I let out a sigh that they probably

heard in the next ward. "You're not a detective then, are you?" I asked.

"I'll tell the world I am," replied my visitor proudly. "How'd you know it?"

"Oh, I just guessed it!" I mumbled.

"I'm a graduate of the Hardstraw Home Study Detective School. I took the whole course of twelve lessons last winter—and I got my star and my diploma." He flung back his coat and displayed the evidence.

"Help!" I gasped, sinking into a semi-swoon.

"Well, I gotta be goin'." I heard his voice as if it were miles away. "I hope you and Mr. Metz and Mr. Marshall will be up and around soon. I'm goin' back home to-night. I suppose I'll be gettin' my lesson seven in the mail pretty soon. Good-by!"

"Good-by!" I echoed weakly.

"False alarm," said Slick with a grin, coming out from under his ambush. Then his face took on a sad expression. "All that trouble and all these bruises for nothing!" he groaned. "Gosh! Oh, well," he went on, after a pause, "we can go back now and pick up some more twenties."

"We won't!" I snapped. "I'm through."

"We can't go back!" wailed Spence with a peculiar catch in his voice.

"Why not?" asked Slick.

Our bandaged president groaned loudly and long. "You—know—that—check—for—that—car?" he spoke weakly and haltingly.

"Yes."

"Well"—Spence flopped back with another groan—"I signed Branner's name to that check."

I fainted away.

THE WORLD—AND A MAN

By James Edward Hungerford

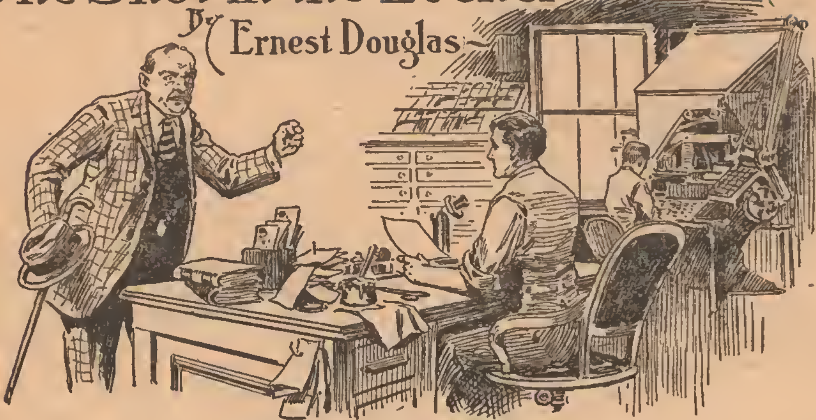
I HAVE followed the beck of adventure's lure,
 And circled the hemisphere;
I have seen my share of the sights, for sure—
 And some that were strange and queer!
I have looped-the-loop aboard sailing ships,
 Both schooner and barkentine,
And done my bit aboard whaling ships,
 And shipped as a buck marine.

I have roamed wherever the rovers roam;
 Am wise to the "kinks" and "curls,"
And whatever place I am in is home,
 On this little world, that whirls!
No matter what part of the globe it be,
 Wherever I hang my hat,
I figure that place is the place for me—
 A pretty good place, at that!

I have sailed the seas with a motley crew,
 From China and Maine and Spain;
I have met all kinds, and of ev'ry hue—
 And I am here to explain;
No matter the place, or the race, or clan—
 Just do your part, with a grin,
And there's always room for a real he-man,
 No matter what port you're in!

One Shot in the Locker

By Ernest Douglas



(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

BLAZING WITH ANGER.

TOO amazed for speech, Fred Nagle stared at the ten-dollar bill on his desk. Before he recovered his composure sufficiently to express his thoughts, Coulson was out of the office, beyond call. The four days that had elapsed since Nagle took over the *Weekly Mining Record* had been one long string of surprises. Nothing in Valentine seemed to jibe with his previous experience; but nothing else had seemed absolutely inexplicable, like this.

Gingerly Nagle lifted the greenback, also the closely typewritten sheet of legal-size paper on which it lay, and bore them back to Harry Myers, foreman over himself and the one linotype operator that comprised the *Mining Record's* mechanical force. Nagle dropped them on an imposing stone, amid a collection of job type in process of being distributed to the cases.

"Coulson just left these here," he said bewilderedly, rubbing an inky hand over blond hair so closely cropped that the pinkish scalp glowed through. "You know Coulson, probably; he's president of the Great Valentine Consolidated Copper Company. At least, that's what he says he is."

"Yeah; I know the old crook. What about him?"

"Well, after he introduced himself, he handed me this copy and said he'd brought me something to help fill the paper to-morrow. I looked it over. It says that the whole district is 'wildly excited' over a 'phenomenal strike of high-grade ore' made in his company's ground, and predicts that the stock will jump from fifty cents to ten dollars a share within thirty days.

"It seemed to me," Nagle went on, "that if there had been any such strike and such excitement I'd have heard something about it, but I told him that if I could verify the story I'd print it.

"'Verify be hanged!' he growled. 'I'm in a hurry. Here's something to buy yourself a bottle of hooch with.' Then he threw down this bill and left."

The old printer sat down on a stool and gazed owlishly at the *Mining Record's* youthful proprietor through ancient steel-bowed spectacles that rode far down toward the tip of his magenta-colored nose. Suddenly he burst into a prolonged chuckle. "Oh, Charley!" he wheezed, waving his hands hilariously in the air. "Come over here. This is good."

Slade, the fat little linotype operator, left his machine and joined them. "Wherefore the merriment?" he inquired.

"Coulson led in one of his puffs to the new boss," Myers explained. "Gave him strict orders to run it and just to show he was a good fellow slipped him a ten to buy himself a bottle with."

"Gosh, but he's getting liberal! I don't believe he ever gave Marston more than five," commented Slade.

"Do you mean to tell me that Marston ever ran stuff like this in the *Record?*" asked Nagle.

"Sure; he did," answered Myers. "If you don't believe it, look through the files. It was copy all written out for him and saved him the trouble of clipping just so much out of the exchanges. And he looked on Coulter's tips as so much found money.

"Marston was the feeblest-minded old booze-hound that ever got hold of a print shop and posed as a newspaper man," the old printer went on. "About as industrious as a second-hand wipe rag. All he cared about was the supposed glory of being an editor. Chance here for a real paper, too. You must have seen it when you paid him five hundred dollars to get out and let you assume his mortgage at the bank."

"But how much truth do you suppose there is in this story of a strike?"

"How much truth is there in 'Grimm's Fairy Tales?' It's just some more of Coulson's bait to catch suckers with. Marston didn't have any more sense of honor than to boost his skin game for the price of a shot of bootleg now and then.

"The Great Valentine Consolidated," Myers continued, "is some sheep pasture out west of town that he has been selling stock on ever since the Valentine Extension came in last winter as the camp's second big mine and started a sort of boom here. He never had more than two or three men working there, and I hear that they have been laid off."

"And so this cheap crook thinks that the *Weekly Mining Record* is going to help along his dirty swindle," Nagle remarked slowly. "Gives me all of ten dollars to salve my conscience. Well, he'll find out that no ten-dollar man is running this rag now."

Nagle was moving toward the entrance, slowly at first and then with rapidly accelerating speed. Without waiting for his hat, he dashed out into the bright sunlight of Conglomerate Street, up a square to Main, and into the Bank of Valentine building. He bounded up a flight of stairs and hurled himself through an ornately lettered door.

His deceptively mild-blue eyes were blazing with unaccustomed fire as he demanded of a gum-chewing girl where Coulson might be seen. She indicated another door, leading to a private office.

"In there," she said. "Busy just now. Sit down and wait."

Nagle was in no mood for delay, but there was nothing else to do. He subsided into an overstuffed chair and began pulling at the lobe of his right ear, a little trick that he had when he was much excited. He glanced curiously around the elaborately furnished room with its thick carpets, golden-oak tables, and shiny filing cases. Everything breathed an air of solidity and prosperity. There must be money in peddling bogus mining stock.

CHAPTER II.

NO MORE COME-ON STUFF!

THE gum-chewing girl was folding some circulars and slipping them into envelopes. Nagle caught a glimpse of one and thought that he saw something familiar. He asked if he might examine one, and with a pert "Sure!" she passed him a sheet.

There, at the top of the page, in red letters an inch high, was this admonition:

> Read what the editor of the *Valentine Mining Record*, published in the heart of the greatest copper district on earth, says about Great Valentine Consolidated!

This was followed by a reproduction of a newspaper article, set in type closely resembling that of the *Record*, which praised in unreserved terms "the scientific thoroughness with which the Great Valentine Consolidated is going about the development of the District's third big mine."

"Competent geologists now admit," the article continued, "that the Consolidated has the cream of the Valentine area, that it is sure to be even larger and richer than either the United Valentine or the Extension." Production within six months and "fabulous" dividends within a year were predicted.

"Where was this printed?" Nagle inquired.

"Los Angeles. Mr. Coulson always gets his printin' done there. Says it don't pay to bother with these small-town shops. They do bum work and then overcharge for it."

At that, Nagle saw red. Coulson had been getting the *Record* to publish panegyrics about his "mine" and then having the matter reproduced by a city printery for distribution to his dupes as authoritative news.

The young publisher strode to the closed door and threw it open. Coulson sat dictating to a stenographer. His leather chair was an enormous one, but not large enough for his corpulent frame. His ears, eyes, and nose seemed ridiculously small, insignificant, for such a huge head. As for the chin, it was buried under layers of fat.

"I'm busy," Coulson boomed with an annoyed wave of a bediamonded cushion of a hand. "Wait out there."

By a mighty effort Nagle regained a semblance of calmness. He slammed the ten-dollar bill and its accompanying manuscript on Coulson's desk. "You've made a mistake," he said evenly. "The *Record* is not that sort of a paper. Not any more. It has changed hands."

"What's the matter with this story?"

"We're not printing any come-on stuff. Not for ten dollars—not for ten million dollars. You put it all over poor old Marston and then even had your printing done out of town, but——"

"Oh, if it's a matter of printing——"

"It's not. I won't do printing of any kind for you at any price, and I don't want your lying press-agent dope. The only way you can get it into the *Record* is to buy the paper. No; you can't even do that, because the paper is not for sale—to you."

"Say, you young whippersnapper, you get out of here! And you print this story in that bum sheet of yours or I'll break you."

"There'll be a Valentine Consolidated story in the regular issue of the *Mining Record* to-morrow, all right; but it won't be the kind of a story you'll sell much stock on."

Nagle stamped out and returned to the *Record* office. There he sat down to think things out. The more he thought, the angrier he became, the more determined to carry out his threat to expose Coulson.

He went back into the mechanical department again. "I gather," he said to Myers, "that this is not the first fake company that Coulson has floated."

"You bet it's not! That burglar has operated in every camp of the Southwest. Wherever a strike is made, or for some other reason there is a little excitement, he lights, organizes a corporation with a fancy name, and starts to shoot literature to his sucker list. He'll promise anything. Why the postal authorities have let him alone this long, I can't imagine."

"Where can I get all the data on his career?"

"Thinking of starting something, eh? Well, I hope you've got the nerve to go through with it. If you want the real low-down on Coulson, see old Stofen, the broker."

The telephone was ringing, and Nagle hurried forward to answer it. Pateman, cashier of the Bank of Valentine, asked him to step over to the bank immediately. Though Nagle was all aquiver to get at the business uppermost in his mind, there was a reason why he could not ignore any request from Pateman.

"I understand that you and Mr. Coulson have—er—had some words," the lean, cadaverous banker began, when Nagle was alone with him in his private office. His abnormally long and thin fingers clasped a pencil that he tapped nervously on the polished table top.

"Yes; some words," Nagle admitted, taken aback by the unexpected question.

"You—you refused to print a story about the Great Valentine Consolidated?"

"You bet I refused!"

Pateman regarded him long and steadily through odd hexagonal eyeglasses and then said suavely: "I wish you'd print it."

"What! Why, Mr. Pateman, you don't know what he wanted me to publish in my paper. It was the rankest kind of propaganda for his snide company. I'm not going to help him sell his worthless stock to my readers and also have him broadcast the stuff as having been written by me."

"Mr. Nagle, I think you have the

wrong idea. People are going to buy a certain amount of fake securities, whether or no. If they do not invest in worthless mines they will throw their money into dry oil wells, factories that are never built, or unworkable inventions. We may just as well bring as much of that money to Valentine as we can."

This cold-blooded, cynical reasoning astonished Fred Nagle. He could only sit and stare.

"I won't do it!" he cried after a second of surprise. "I won't have anything to do with such barefaced thievery. I'm only twenty-six, Mr. Pateman, but I have been working for newspapers eight years, and in all that time I have never written a line that I did not believe was the absolute truth. Now that I am in business for myself I am not going to start on any other course."

"I wish that you'd print that story, Mr. Nagle. Mr. Coulson is one of our heaviest depositors."

"So that's the reason you're interesting yourself in his dirty work! Well, it wouldn't make any difference if he was president of this bank—the *Record* won't stand sponsor for any of his lies."

"Have you overlooked that little matter of a two-thousand-dollar mortgage that this bank holds on the *Mining Record*, Mr. Nagle?"

The young man paled. For the moment he had forgotten the indebtedness that he had assumed when he bought the paper from Marston.

"It's a demand note, secured by a chattel mortgage," Pateman went on smoothly. "I hope you will not compel us to demand payment."

"You may as well go ahead and demand it, for I'm not going to be a party to Coulson's swindle."

"You are prepared to pay, I suppose?"

"I'm not. Had I been I'd never have arranged with you to carry me."

"Then we shall be compelled to file suit for foreclosure immediately."

"Go ahead and sue. You can't get judgment for at least sixty days, and in that time I can make things mighty uncomfortable for your fat rogue upstairs."

"You'd better reconsider. There's no sense in being a stubborn fool."

"No doubt plain, old-fashioned, copybook honesty and truthfulness impress you as foolishness. You may take the *Record* away from me, but you won't force me down to your moral level. There are several shots in my locker, and you may rest assured they'll all be fired."

CHAPTER III.

TO STOP THAT GAME.

IT was with no great hope that Nagle sought Waldron, cashier of the rival State Exchange Bank, baldly stated his position and asked if he could borrow the money there to pay off the *Record's* mortgage.

"It's my private opinion that Coulson ought to be in several penitentiaries all at once," Waldron commented at the end of Nagle's recital. "But that does not alter the fact that the *Record* has never paid its way. My directors would never allow me to make such a loan; that is, unless you have other collateral."

"But you have never seen the *Record* under any management except Marston's. I can make it pay."

"That remains to be seen. We do not care to take the risk."

"Well, that's that!" Nagle rose to his feet slowly. "But I'm going ahead, just as I told Pateman, and make things hot for Coulson just as long as I can hold on. I may not last long in Valentine, but they'll remember me after I'm gone."

Roscoe Stofen, the broker, proved to be a bent, white-haired little man with a pleasant smile of welcome. He peered shortsightedly at his caller, and while he was shaking hands he pushed a pile of financial journals off the one other chair in his little cubby-hole of an office.

Yes; in his files he had endless clippings and reports bearing on the shady transactions of Alexander P. Coulson. He recalled offhand that Coulson had promoted the Miami Amalgamated, the Bisbee Northern, the Jerome Divide, and the Ajo King. They were rank fakes, every one of them. Practically none of the money raised from stock sales went into development; instead it went into the pockets of Coulson and a few others of that stripe who had been associated with him at various times.

"Men like him are leeches on the min-

ing industry," declared Stofen, vigorously pounding his skinny old fist on the littered desk. "They make all kinds of extravagant claims and promises, sell a lot of glittering certificates, and then make absolutely no attempt to develop mines, to give investors a run for their money. Then when a real mining man with a legitimate prospect comes along and is too honest to guarantee impossible returns, the public passes up his proposition like a cold potato. People like to be humbugged."

"Still, I hold that's no reason why they should be robbed," insisted Nagle. "Now, I'm going after this Coulson party, and I'm going to stop his little game, if it's the last thing I do on earth. Have you any data on the geology of the Great Valentine Consolidated ground?"

"I have a report by Horace Hedstrom, best copper geologist in this country, made years ago for another company," replied Stofen. "He says it's clear out of the possible ore zone. Anybody who knows anything about ore formations can see that.

"I see by the *Record* that Coulson has installed fifty thousand dollars' worth of machinery and sunk a five-hundred-foot shaft," the broker went on. "Well, the company doesn't own so much machinery as a rusty wheelbarrow. He did let a shaft-sinking contract, maybe with the idea of staying within the law, and a little gopher hole was put down about twenty feet."

Until late that evening, Nagle remained in Stofen's office, digging through dusty files and making notes. As the digging progressed, his satisfaction grew, likewise his wonder that Coulson had managed to keep out of jail.

Armed with all the data that he could possibly use, Nagle went back to the now-deserted *Record* office and sat down at his rickety old typewriter. He wrote as one in a frenzy; sheet after sheet came from the machine. He traced the life of Coulson throughout the years that "this modern buccaneer" had lived and plundered within the State.

One by one, he took up the Coulson promotions, quoted from the flamboyant advertising that had been issued, and showed how each proposition had vanished into thin air as soon as the stream of the boobs' money showed signs of stopping.

Nagle speculated upon the total sum that must have been mulcted from deceived investors and demanded that, if Coulson had any of it salted away, the Federal government at once seize it for distribution among those who had been defrauded. In conclusion, Nagle urged that the business men and real mining men of Valentine guard the reputation of the camp by compelling Coulson to move on.

It was a good story—no fine writing, but facts piled on top of facts. He refrained from mentioning Pateman's threat; there would be time enough for that later. Marston, Nagle let down as easily as possible, explaining that the previous proprietor of the *Record* had published Coulson's effusions "without proper investigation."

The article itself finished, he considered the matter of a heading. After numerous experiments he decided upon a streamer across the six columns of the front page, with a pyramid of smaller type beneath. It read:

"Great Valentine Con. a Fraud! Notorious Swindler, Alexander P. Coulson, Peddling Worthless Stock From Local Headquarters. Money Goes Into Vulture's Pocket. Little Into Development of Ground. Authorities Must Take Steps Now to Put Shark Behind Jail Bars."

"Guess there won't be any argument about what I mean!" said Nagle with a tired chuckle as he hung the head on a hook for Myers, stuck the article on a nail by the linotype, and sought his rooming house.

CHAPTER IV.

WHERE WERE THEY?

TWO surprises awaited Fred Nagle when he reached his office the next morning, after sleeping until past eight o'clock. One was to find the door locked; Myers and Slade were not yet at work, though it was press day, and they were supposed to start at seven. The second came in the guise of a telegram, thrust under the door. It was from a Los Angeles house

that had been supplying Marston with paper. It read:

Bank of Valentine has withdrawn guarantee of bill for news print now en route. Must have guarantee from other responsible party or payment on delivery.

Nagle knew that the *Record's* supply of print paper was running short, but Marston had told him of ordering another shipment. Marston had neglected to add, however, that the firm's credit was at such a low ebb that the bank had to stand good for its accounts. Nagle had been counting on the usual sixty days in which to meet the bill.

He ran back to the press and rapidly counted the blank sheets lying on the floor. There were enough for about two hundred papers over the regular edition. Nagle had been planning to print five hundred extras in anticipation of a heavy demand for the Coulson exposé.

"I told Pateman that I had several shots in the locker, but it looks as though I have only one," he mused bitterly. "One issue of the *Record*, and I'm through. But I'll at least go out in a blaze of glory."

Myers and Slade, though—what could be the matter with them? Unless they came along pretty soon, Nagle would have difficulty in firing even his one shot. He telephoned to the lodging house where they roomed together and learned that they had not been there all night.

A chill raced over Nagle. Into his mind immediately flashed the suspicion that Coulson or Pateman, more likely the promoter, had been tampering with his crew. He scarcely knew Myers and Slade; perhaps they were the kind that could be hired to jump out of town and leave him in the lurch. There was not another shop, where printers could be hired or borrowed, within a hundred miles.

Nagle rushed out into the street and hailed a passing boy. The boy said that he knew the missing printers and agreed to make a tour of the resorts where they might be carousing.

Fuming with impatience, Nagle sat down to wait. Then the telephone rang.

"Lookin' for me, boss?" inquired a thick voice that sounded something like Slade's.

"You bet I'm looking for you! Where are you?"

"Where'm I? Me? Oh, you want to know where'm I. Me? I'm at Salazar's."

Nagle had never heard of Salazar's but he did not stop to inquire as to the nature of the place. "When are you coming to work?" he asked sharply.

There was a long pause.

"Say, boss, 's funny," said Slade at last. "Never saw anything like it in all my born days. There's a bird here that's been payin' us to drink with him. Lonesome, I guess. Acshally payin' us——"

"Yes; but where's Myers?"

"Harry? Poor ol' Harry! Everything he drinks goes right to his head. Passed out two hours ago. Under the table. Listen minute, an' you c'n hear 'im snore."

Nagle had heard enough, however. He slammed down the receiver. He had no doubt that the mysterious person so foolish as to hire drinking partners was some employee of Coulson's. Here was the *Record* on press day without one printer.

He went back to the linotype and gazed thoughtfully at its complicated mechanism. It had been years since, as a printer's devil, he had been allowed at infrequent intervals to operate a typesetting machine under close supervision. How he wished now that he had devoted more time to the printing trade and less to the printing business.

"Well," he said as he squared his shoulders. "I can't do any worse than smash it. Pretty soon it will be Pateman's, anyway."

CHAPTER V.

AGAINST ALL ODDS.

WITH a determined frown on his face, Nagle turned the button that switched the current to the electric metal pot of the linotype. While the metal was heating, he went to the cases and set the heading that he had written. Then he returned to the machine, sat down in the chair, touched several keys that caused brass matrices to rattle down from the magazine above.

He depressed the elevator lever, and a train of cams and wheels was set into groaning motion. Soon a hot and shin-

ing slug was ejected into the stick. The first line of the Great Verde Consolidated story was in type.

The linotype would continue to work, he knew, until something went wrong; then he would be unable to repair it. So he proceeded very slowly and carefully. A column in three hours was about his speed, against an expert's column and a half an hour.

Shortly after midday, Nagle looked up to see a gangling, muddy-faced youth of eighteen standing behind him.

"Hello! Who are you?"

"I'm Bill Oldham. Used to be devil here. Need any help?"

"Help's just what I do need. But I want an operator, not a devil. Stick around, though; I can use you later on. Here, take this and buy me a sandwich."

Bill Oldham brought the sandwich from a near-by lunch counter and oozed into the dark region beyond the press. Nagle thought no more about him until clouds of smoke began to pour forth. He dashed to the rear of the shop and found his meager pile of print paper in flames, with the devil looking on in apparent helplessness.

A bucket of water extinguished the fire almost instantly. About three hundred sheets, Nagle estimated after a hasty examination, had been damaged. The *Record's* circulation would be a hundred copies less than the regular circulation, instead of two hundred over.

"What does this mean?" he snarled.

"I—I just come back here to take a smoke, boss," Oldham whimpered.

"Well, maybe it was only an accident. But stick around out there where I can see you. If you're any good at making up forms, get busy on that. Make up three pages out of anything you find around the shop—pictures, old advertisements, anything. That story I'm setting will take up all the front page."

The devil busied himself over the imposing stones while Nagle plugged away at the linotype. The afternoon was waning when he set the last line and ordered Oldham to pull proofs. As he had expected, the proofs were full of typographical errors; it took him over an hour to make necessary corrections.

Drooping with fatigue, Nagle sat on a stool and watched his sullen assistant arrange the type for the front page. If he had good luck with the press he might place the *Record* on sale at the news stands before they closed that night.

As he stepped over to the sink for a drink of water, he was brought up short by a horrifying crash. He wheeled and saw a clutter of type on the floor. That precious front-page form was pied; the slugs were scattered.

"I didn't go to drop it, boss. I was just liftin' it to——"

"Get out!" Nagle screamed, seizing a heavy iron side-stick and flourishing it at the mischief-maker. "Get out of this shop. I ought to have known this afternoon that you——"

"Where's my pay?"

"Go to Coulson for your pay. Get out!"

He made a lunge, and the boy beat a hasty retreat through the front door.

Nagle stood staring at the wreckage in dismay. What a fool he had been to accept Bill Oldham at his face value. He might have known that Coulson would not stop with merely getting the regular force drunk.

For five minutes, Nagle picked up slugs and tried to arrange them in their proper sequence. Deciding that this task was almost impossible, he resolved to reset the first few paragraphs of the story and add a short explanation of how publication of the complete article had been prevented. The remainder of the page he would fill with old cuts.

Just as he was sitting down again, he heard footsteps coming through the office. For an instant he saw the grinning face of Bill Oldham, then a stone came whizzing by his head and crashed into the linotype.

To chase Oldham out of the shop and lock the door gave Nagle no comfort. Again he had been a fool; even after the youth had proved himself a traitor he had left the way open for him to return and work destruction.

The linotype was totally out of commission. A hundred dollars' worth of delicate parts would be required to restore it to working order, and their installation would take Slade—sober—at least a day.

"Fred, they're not going to let you fire your one and only shot," the weary publisher mumbled to himself. "Am I licked? Not yet!"

First of all he reset the heading; there was type enough left in the cases for that. Then he cleaned off a big table and began to pick up the scattered linotype slugs. He peered at the type on each one and tried to remember approximately where in the story that particular line belonged. Slugs were soon scattered all over the table. Then one whole paragraph was reassembled.

Slowly, laboriously, the work continued. He pulled proof after proof, crawled around on the floor searching for lost slugs.

It was long after midnight when the front page was again entire. His eyes were burning and smarting from the strain, and he could scarcely drag one foot after the other. Now, however, he felt sure of success; he even whistled tunelessly as he lugged the heavy forms to the press.

The press began to rumble. Nagle got as good a grip on himself as possible and fed the sheets with meticulous care. His paper supply was so low that he could not afford to spoil any. In spite of his pains, however, a sheet now and then went crooked into the grippers and was torn to pieces. He was sadly out of practice as a pressman, and after seventeen hours of wearing labor his nerves were none too steady.

Grimly he toiled on until the pile of paper was exhausted. "That's the one I've been looking for," he thought as the last sheet was fed.

CHAPTER VI.

BESIEGED BY THE ENEMY.

THE sun was just rising over the high mountain rim in the east, amid a glory of pink and gold, when an inky scarecrow opened the door and stumbled out into Conglomerate Street with a bundle of perhaps a hundred folded papers under his arm. The street was deserted, except for a bulky individual whose overalls and features were covered with black grime. Nagle supposed that he was some mine machinist going off shift and scarcely noticed him until the stranger bumped against him and seized the papers.

"Here, what do you mean?" Nagle asked peevishly, thinking now that he had collided with a drunken man.

For reply, the unknown jerked the papers away and landed a heavy fist on Nagle's jaw. The newspaper man hit the ground, face downward, amid a shower of shooting stars. A pair of hob-nailed shoes landed in the middle of his back.

Nagle realized at once that he had been waylaid by another henchman of Coulson's and probably would be very thoroughly beaten up. While blows showered upon his head, his hands groped around in search of some weapon. One of them touched a smooth surface that he knew for the *Record's* refuse can.

With a sudden wrench, Nagle regained his feet. He seized the handles of the can and swung it at his antagonist, who hesitated for the fraction of a second before this novel weapon.

Taking advantage of that hesitation, Nagle dropped the can and fled to the door of the *Record* office. He tore the key from his pocket, by great good fortune hit the keyhole at the first thrust, slipped through, and slammed the door in his assailant's face. He wondered if Coulson's thug would try to break through the glass, but that individual simply leered at him and began to gather up the *Records* scattered about.

"Got me besieged in my own office!" Nagle groaned as he tremblingly dropped into a chair. "Here I am, without a gun of any kind to go out and shoot that bully with. Marston told me to get myself a revolver, too."

A grin overspread his face as he reached for the telephone, intending to call the police and demand protection.

Central did not reply. The line was dead.

"No; they didn't forget to cut the phone line," he murmured. "Now, what? I might as well fight a buzz saw as to tackle that fellow outside."

Space was so limited in Valentine, up on the side of Mazeppa Mountain, that the camp had no alleys. Between the building occupied by the *Record* and the one to the west of it on Main Street,

there was a party wall with no opening. There were a few high windows along the south side of the building, but they were no doubt watched as carefully as the front door.

Nagle shambled to the extreme rear of the shop and eyed the ceiling, which was of some composition board. Two tables, one piled on top of the other, enabled him to reach the ceiling. With a hammer, he pounded a hole through it. He clambered up into a dark and musty space and was barely able to reach the shingle roof.

Returning to the shop, he secured a short stepladder that, set on two rafters and steadied with nails, allowed him to attack the shingles with his hammer. It was important that he make little noise, for he did not want to warn the thug who was out in front of the building. Eventually, though, he broke through to the light of day.

With another bundle of papers, Nagle crawled out upon the roof. Softly he crept forward and stepped on the roof of the adjoining Main Street building. Halfway to the front, he peered over the edge on the north side. Just below him was a landing with a flight of stairs leading to the street. He dropped over, struck the landing and half ran, half fell, down the steps.

The first person that Nagle saw after reaching the sidewalk was Alexander P. Coulson. Resplendent in a white linen suit, silk shirt, canvas shoes and Panama hat, that smug rascal was the picture of dignity and righteousness.

"Paper, Mr. Coulson," said Nagle, presenting him with a copy of the *Record*.

Coulson took one look at the glaring headlines and rushed toward Nagle with upraised cane, bellowing like an enraged bull. The young man dodged through a knot of miners in front of a restaurant, dropping papers as he went.

"Stop him!" boomed the promoter. "Let me get to him. I'll kill——"

"Here! Here! What's all this?" inquired a policeman, laying a hand on Nagle's arm.

"Arrest him, officer. Arrest him for criminal libel and malicious defamation of character."

"Can't do it without a warrant. Of course, if he attacked you——"

"He won't swear out any warrant," Nagle interjected contemptuously. "Getting himself into court is the last thing he has any idea of doing. Paper! All about the Great Verde Consolidated, the biggest steal in the history of mining. Come on and read the truth, friends. *Records* are free to-day."

His bundle was exhausted in a moment, and Nagle returned to the *Record* office via the regular entrance, flanked by the policeman. The ruffian on guard there dodged into a pool hall as soon as they came in view and was seen no more.

CHAPTER VII.

WHIRLING LIKE A MERRY-GO-ROUND.

AN hour later, having given away his last paper and snatched a bite of breakfast, Nagle sat at his desk removing some personal effects. In a few minutes he would telephone Pateman and tell him the place was his. Nagle's first venture into the publishing business had not been a startling success from a financial standpoint, but deep in his being there was a comforting sense of having done a good job well.

A fuzzy little man, with large bushy whiskers and overhanging eyebrows, shuffled into the office and stood uncertainly at the counter. "Are you Mr. Nagle?" he asked with a strong accent.

"That's my name," the young man answered as he arose.

"I'm Yarmolinsky," the caller said, enthusiastically seizing Nagle's hand. "Young man, I want to congratulate you. That was a fine piece of work. Splendid! Excellent! I'm glad somebody has had the courage to tell the truth about that get-rich-quicker. That feller Coulson's a thief, a robber. He never done this town no good, but he's done it more harm than a fire!

"As a business man, Mr. Nagle," he went on, "I want to help you keep on givin' Valentine a real newspaper. I want to sign an advertisin' contract."

"You're too late," Nagle replied sadly. "I'm going to be closed out. That was the only shot in my locker."

"Closed out? Who's goin' to do that?"

"The Bank of Valentine. Pateman told me that if I didn't print a nice story

about the Great Valentine Consolidated he'd foreclose my mortgage. Well, I printed the other kind of a story."

"Pateman told you that? Say, I'm goin' to take my account out of his bank right now." Muttering under his breath, Yarmolinsky trotted out.

The telephone bell rang. It was Waldron, cashier of the State Exchange Bank. "Well, I see you've gone and done it," he said dryly. "You sure stirred up this town. Heard any comments?"

"No; only from an old chap named Yarmolinsky. He seemed to think that I'd done something wonderful for Valentine and offered to sign an advertising contract. When I told him that he was too late, that Pateman was closing me out, he threatened to withdraw his account from Pateman's bank. Looked as though he might have all of a dollar and a half there, too."

"Oh, so that's the way he looked to you!" exclaimed Waldron. "Well, you have several things to learn about Valentine. Peter Yarmolinsky owns half this town, outside of the mines. His account is probably ten times as heavy as Coulson's. If he withdraws it all at once, he'll seriously embarrass that bank, if he doesn't break it."

"Oh!" Nagle gasped.

"And I suppose you thought that he'd sign a contract to spend maybe five dollars a month with you?"

"Well, yes; that was about my idea."

"If Pete Yarmolinsky decides to advertise in the *Record,* he won't spend less than a hundred dollars a month. Furthermore, he's a bellwether among the merchants here—president of the Chamber of Commerce and all that. Whatever he does, the rest will do. He never spent a dime with Marston, but you can't blame him for that.

"Now you go right out and get Peter's name on the dotted line," went on Waldron. "Then you go up and down Main Street and show that contract to every business man you can find. Tell them you're going to keep on shooing the crooked promoters out of this camp and encourage legitimate mining enterprise that will result in the discovery of real mines to bring real prosperity. Then you bring their contracts to me and get the money to pay off Pateman's mortgage. They'll be good enough collateral."

"Oh!" Fred Nagle could think of nothing else to say. His head was whirling like a runaway merry-go-round. "It pays sometimes to be a stubborn fool and to fire the last shot in the locker," he whispered to himself with a queer little grin.

Late that afternoon, his pockets bulging with signed advertising contracts, Nagle chanced to pass the Bank of Valentine building. The furniture of the Great Valentine Consolidated Company was being moved out. It was rumored that the post-office department had started an investigation.

Pateman emerged from the bank and hurried across to him. "I've been trying all day to get you on the telephone, Mr. Nagle," he said nervously. "Say, I've changed my mind about that mortgage. You may let it ride as long as you like."

"No, thanks. I'll pay it off in the morning."

"You're going to pay it off?" Pateman's face fell. "But several of my best customers have interceded in your behalf. They were quite insistent. Mr. Yarmolinsky in particular says that we need you in Valentine. You'll tell them that I didn't press you, won't you?"

Nagle smiled. "No," he said gently; "I'm not going to say a word about it."

How did this story strike you? A few words about it, if you will be good enough to write them and send them to the editor. We ask you to say, without reserve, just what you think of it. And in the same letter, please give us your opinion of TOP-NOTCH in general.

How He Saved Them

WILLIE had been forbidden to try his new skates because his parents thought the ice was not safe. Consequently, when he appeared in the doorway, dripping wet, there was trouble brewing.

"Don't be angry, mother," he remarked, "because I've just saved three men and two women from drowning."

"How?" demanded his mother.

"Why," explained Willie, "they were just going on the ice when I broke through."

Tale of the United States Navy



Ambition's Urge

By Frank Richardson Pierce

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

BETTER THAN NOTHING.

THE admiral's chatter slightly annoyed Coxswain Carmody. This, perhaps, would have amazed the admiral had he known it, but it certainly would not have disturbed his peace of mind. It is doubtful if he knew of Carmody's existence as an individual. Carmody was merely a part of a swiftly moving motor boat that was taking the admiral and one of his staff to the flagship. Besides, the fleet commander was having troubles of his own.

"We are on Puget Sound for the summer," the admiral was informing the staff officer, "and what I want is a summer home, tucked back a few hundred feet from a cove. The house must be surrounded by trees; there must be a hammock on the front porch and a beach for bathing. I want to doze in the hammock, swim once in a while, stretch out on the beach. I'd like to drift around in a leaky skiff, get my feet wet, and catch fish with any ragged kid that will honor me with his company. My own children are grown, you know."

"Not a bad old bird at that," mused Carmody to himself, "considering the formality that goes with navy life. Discipline is a fine and necessary thing, but I'll never consider my life a success until I have slapped an admiral on the back in hearty good fellowship. I think it would do us both good."

Carmody ceased his musing abruptly, for the admiral was talking again. For some reason the coxswain felt no annoyance, though he had sufficient reason to be peevish.

"I have called on a number of real-estate people," said the fleet commander, "but they can't seem to give me just what I want, and I haven't time to go out and hunt. I suppose I'll end up by spending my summer at some big hotel where everything is polite, formal, and proper, and where no one will ever forget for a moment that an admiral of a battleship fleet is in their midst and treat him with the conventional respect. The only person I know of who is not impressed by rank is a small boy, and——"

Carmody did not hear the rest of the sentence, because the motor boat pulled up alongside the flagship. He was busy, giving signals. When his distinguished passenger had been properly helped to the gangway, and he had shoved off, the machinist mate operating the motor spoke what was on his mind.

"What do you know about the 'Old Man' himself hailing us? Why wasn't his barge standing by for him? Somebody aboard the flagship will catch it."

"It's a good thing for me that I backed up to the float when I saw the staff officer running down the gangway," said Carmody. "Naturally, he didn't explain

things to me, merely asked if we would take them out to the flagship, but I gathered they had finished up business a half hour sooner than they expected and figured they'd have no trouble getting a boat to take them out. Well, it will make me late getting back to the ship, and I'll miss the liberty-party boat."

"Sure, but the exec is a good scout. When you explain, he'll send you ashore, you lucky dog."

"Why the compliment?" queried Carmody.

"Well, that was her, wasn't it, I saw you taking to a movie the other night?"

Carmody grinned. "That was her. I've got six months more in this man's navy, then we're going to settle down and marry."

"Let's see the ring. I saw you sneaking a look at it a couple of times, coming out."

Carmody flushed beneath his healthy coat of tan. He had risked a couple of looks, but such was his caution that he thought no one had observed him. "It isn't much of a ring," he explained, "but that's what comes from blowing your jack. When you meet the right girl and want to give her the best in the land, you're broke."

"How well I know it! I've been engaged four times; it didn't take, somehow, but I always felt the same. I took a good look at the girl, and she seems to me the sort that would love the ring for what it meant and not because it was bigger than any ring the other girls in her crowd wore."

"You said it, and that's just why I wanted to give her the best there was," said Carmody. "That kind of a girl deserves it. You know, some of 'em are cats. I can hear 'em saying, 'Well, I see that Laura Brett has thrown herself away on a sailor, and did you notice the ring he gave her? No? Well, you can barely see the set with the naked eye.' Then some other pork-and-beans friend will pass the word to Laura, and that will hurt.

"I was thinking about it coming out," Carmody continued, "and that's why the admiral's chatter kinda got on my nerves. All he is worrying about is a house, and me—I've got a real worry. I told Laura I'd bring the ring out this evening, and the set isn't half as big as I'd like, and every time I look at it, it gets smaller."

"Well, Carmody, a bird like you should thrive on trouble. Why don't you cash in on your ability? You've done everything you wanted to do. You put over that Christmas-tree affair and the track meet and a tennis tournament and a fist-fest and——"

"No; I haven't done everything I've wanted to. For some reason I have always wanted to slap an admiral on the back, but never have."

"You've got ambitions, boy! Once, my greatest ambition was to kick an ensign, and I stopped my foot just in time."

CHAPTER II.

PLUNGING INTO IT.

WHEN he was aboard his ship, the *Saratoga,* Carmody explained the delay to the officer of the deck, who nodded understandingly. "Shift into your liberty blues, and we'll send you ashore," he said. "You have a forty-eight-hour leave, I believe?"

"Yes, sir!"

Carmody hurried below, pausing just once to look at the ring. "The set's about the size of a turnip seed," he muttered, "and something's got to be done."

Fifteen minutes later, he was sent ashore in lonely grandeur. He made for the nearest telephone and called up Laura Brett.

"I'm late, but will explain when I see you," Carmody told her. "Be out in an hour, if that is all right."

He hung up the receiver and again looked at the ring. "I sure do hate to give this chip to her," he muttered. "She's the kind that will love it and never take it off, and it's about as big as the head of a pin. Oh, well! I'll make it up, some way—a man is sure a fool to blow his money."

He was fairly contented as he swung up Second Avenue. It was late afternoon, the sun was shining, and it seemed to be a pretty good old world. Something caught his eye, a bluish sparkle that left its effect before it was gone. He stopped so suddenly that he was bumped into by a man.

Carmody apologized, then stepped across the walk to the window. It was the same establishment at which he had purchased a ring several days before. The stone in the window was set in platinum and rested on a square of blue plush, as if it had suddenly fallen from the jewel box, two inches away. There were other stones in the window, but they made no impression on him.

Carmody gasped, then said, "That's it!" It would catch the eye anywhere; it was large, but not too large for good taste. He entered the store. "If you ever used the old knob," he told himself, "now is the time to do it, but the first thing is to get an option or whatever they call it on that ring."

A clerk recognized Carmody and hurried forward.

"How much for that ring in the window?"

The clerk arched his eyebrows in surprise, mentioned the price, and Carmody blinked.

"I'll appreciate it, if you will hold it for me," he managed to say.

"There will be a deposit, of course!" remarked the clerk.

"Sure. Will you take this ring as first payment, at the price I paid you for it several days ago?"

"That can be arranged, I am sure."

"Thanks! Then give me a receipt, and I'll be back in a few days."

Carmody hurried away the moment he was given the receipt. He had taken the plunge and was shooting downward at breath-taking speed. Soon he must sink or swim. Outside of the store, he wiped his brow and went into executive session with himself. "I might browse up to the Arena, get a preliminary bout, take a drubbing for the loser's end of the purse," he mused. "No; she wouldn't like that, and it wouldn't be giving my ship a square deal either.

"Pick-and-shovel work is out of the question," he went on thoughtfully. "I might play the stock market, but I'd probably lose. Crap game? No! Hah! I've got it! I wonder if there is anything in navy regulations covering it, and if so, could they hang me? They'd want to, and it will take an act of Congress to get me clear if I'm caught, but as our skipper says, 'Don't hesitate to take a chance—John Paul Jones did.' Trouble is, I'm not sure that the admiral is sold on John Paul Jones, however—here goes!"

CHAPTER III.

LOOKING THEM OVER.

AT the home of a mutual friend, Carmody donned the natty business suit he kept ashore. Then he borrowed the friend's car and drove to Laura's home, five miles an hour over the limit. Motor-cycle officers seemed to be elsewhere. "Hop in, Laura," he invited, "we'll pick up a lunch downtown and take it with us. We are going house hunting."

"House hunting!" Her eyes were round with amazement. "So soon?"

He smiled. "Well, won't you get a kick out of it?"

"Of course." She took a seat beside him. Within a half hour she realized his ideas of a home and hers were as far apart as the poles. They were inspecting homes too far from the city and much too large. It would require servants to keep such establishments up and a car to run to and from town.

She expected and preferred to do her own housekeeping the first year. Of course they would have a car, too, but not right away. Carmody drove down many narrow winding roads that seemed to go nowhere, but eventually ended in some cove down on the Sound. He would glance briefly about, then turn around, and tackle some other road.

The long twilight of a Puget Sound summer evening was merging into darkness when he stopped a few yards from the water. A home, dark and deserted, stood on a ridge a few yards away. Several noisy boys were engaged in a ball game on the beach, thanks to the tide's being out. Evidently they lived just over the hill, for no houses stood in the immediate vicinity.

"Let's look over this house, Laura," suggested Carmody.

"It is too large and too far out for us," she remarked, "but it will be fun, looking it over."

There was a neat sign at the gate which read, "Snuggle Inn." Perhaps it

was a good name for a summer home, but Carmody removed the sign and tossed it into the bay.

"I have a much better name," he explained. "Remind me to see a painter the first thing in the morning, will you?"

The boys told them who owned the place, the real-estate firm in immediate charge, and one of the youngsters legged it for his mother, who had the keys. Carmody and the girl inspected the house from cellar to garret, thanked the woman, and departed. The boys stood around as he backed the car onto the road.

"You kids play on the beach much?" queried Carmody.

"Just about all the time! We've got a skiff, and you can catch crabs just off that old dock; salmon run off the point. They say that's why they can't get people to stay in the house, on account of us kids playing around, but a kid can't keep quiet all the time."

"That's true, son. Well, I'll see you to-morrow. Might have the old skiff on the beach, too. S'long, boys."

Laura regarded her fiancé curiously. "You certainly have aroused my curiosity. What are you going to do?"

"I don't dare tell you!" he replied, but he did.

CHAPTER IV.

WOULD THE SCHEME WORK?

EARLY the next morning Carmody was waiting at a real-estate office when the manager arrived. "What's the matter with Snuggle Inn?" he queried.

"We can't sell it or get a tenant to remain any length of time," replied the manager. "Most people who will go so far out do so for rest, and there's a troop of savages in the vicinity that thinks the cove is the only place they can play. Interested? We believe in being frank with our clients, for we wish to keep them. I've told you all that is wrong with Snuggle Inn."

"Thanks. How much will you give me, if I rent it for you for the summer?"

"Oh, you are looking for a position, eh? I thought you wanted to rent it!" The manager was disappointed.

"What's the difference? You've nothing to lose by putting me to work on a commission basis, and I think I can do you some good. How about it?"

"I'll give you a hundred dollars, if you rent it. That's more than we usually pay, but the place may remain vacant the whole season."

"Good. We're getting down to business. Now, how much if I sell it for you?"

"Listen, young man, don't kid me, for I'm not in a mood to be joshed about Snuggle Inn. Offhand, I'd say five hundred dollars, if we got our price which, I assure you, is bedrock."

"I am not kidding. I am in earnest. Will you make me a memo of that? I'll be back this noon. If I do business at all, it'll be completed within thirty-six hours. I've got to. Good-by!"

Carmody then drove to the paint shop, where he picked up a sign.

"I hurried it through," said the sign painter, "soon as I got your telephone message. Is that what you want? I had to enamel it and bake her a bit in the oven to get it dry. Tried to make it look like an old sign, but it looks new."

"It won't be noticed where I am going to use it!" Carmody declared.

He paid the man and drove at top speed to Snuggle Inn. The boys were already on the beach with the leaky skiff, but he merely waved to them.

It was ten o'clock when he returned to town and parked his car near the municipal float. By good fortune he dodged a *Saratoga* boat and boarded a flagship boat as it was shoving off. To give a snappy touch to his business suit, he had purchased a new hat, and his appearance was both natty and prosperous. Outwardly he was calm, but inwardly he was uneasy. He sighed as he stepped aboard the flagship and told his business to the officer of the deck. An orderly appeared and vanished and presently a staff officer came up.

"Sufferin' cats!" muttered Carmody. "It's the man I ferried out with the admiral yesterday."

"You wish to see the admiral?" The officer eyed him sharply. "I've seen you before somewhere, have I not?" he added.

"Perhaps, sir," replied Carmody. "I'm around quite a bit! The admiral is in-

terested in a summer home, and my firm has the very thing he desires, I believe. I am here to outline it to him, and to take him out at his convenience, if he wishes."

"Come with me, Mr. Carmody!" requested the staff officer.

There was a sweet satisfaction in that—a staff officer "mistering" an enlisted man. "Yep," Carmody whispered to himself, as he entered the sanctum of fleet sanctums; "it'll take an act of Congress to get me out of this, if I'm caught."

Apparently the admiral was willing to listen, for he invited Carmody to have a seat, and after a moment's delay, joined him.

"We believe in spreading our cards on the table at the beginning, sir, so as not to waste a client's time or our own. The one drawback to the house—and that is regarded by some as a great one—is the fact that three or four small boys hang around the cove where this home is. They are just average, clean-minded youngsters who fish, play, and occasionally scrap."

"Huh!" grunted the admiral. "Proceed."

Carmody remembered the admiral's words of the previous day. "The house sets on a ridge a few hundred feet from the cove; there is plenty of shade and a hammock where one might take a nap on a cool afternoon. Down on the beach, there's an old dock where you can dangle your feet, cut bait, and fish. Off the point, salmon. Are you interested?"

"I should say I am! Why didn't the firm send you to me about this before?"

Carmody did not explain. That the admiral was interested did not surprise him, for he had hunted until he found a place that filled the officer's specifications. It was all quite simple until Carmody thought of his own situation, then he squirmed inwardly. Perhaps the mental pressure was too great for even his healthy self. Rather abruptly he came to the point. "I shall be very glad to take you out there this afternoon, sir!" That confounded "sir" crept in too frequently for comfort.

The admiral did not seem surprised at it, however. He was accustomed to the word perhaps. He consulted a list of engagements. "Very well, Mr. Carmody. I'll look it over, if you will have me back here by four o'clock."

"Certainly. Suppose I meet you at the float at two?"

"Very good. I merely wish to rent the place, you understand!"

"Yes, sir!"

The admiral called a staff officer. "The regular boat will not leave for a half hour. Send Mr. Carmody ashore in the barge, if he is in a hurry."

"Thank you, sir!" said Carmody, swallowing a lump in his throat. Yes; it would take two acts of Congress to get him out of this mess, if he was caught.

When the barge docked, the *Saratoga's* boat was just unloading. Carmody gathered his physical and mental forces together and cut dead those shipmates who thought he looked a lot like Carmody of their crew. Still, the fact he had unloaded from the admiral's barge helped materially in getting away with it.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT DECIDED HIM.

SHORTLY before two o'clock, Carmody saw the barge coming from the flagship. "If I rent the place to him, I'll get a hundred dollars. Not bad, but I'll still be seventy-five dollars shy with all I can dig up. Rings sure cost, but they're worth it. Good afternoon, sir!"

Carmody stepped briskly forward and escorted his client to the car. Away from ships and things suggesting the service, he became less uncomfortable. Perhaps an executive order and not a Congressional act would turn the trick, if his scheme was discovered.

The car came gently to a stop before the house. The newness of the paint on the nameboard passed unnoticed, the name itself was most appropriate—"Snug Harbor." The admiral had sought that sort of a harbor more than once in his lifetime. An uproar on the beach diverted his attention, just as he was about to enter the gate. Three boys were paddling the leaky skiff, a fourth was bailing, while a fifth was attempting to scoop up a crab from the water with the aid of a long pole to which was attached a wire scoop.

"Let's watch the outcome!" The admiral's eyes were sparkling.

Presently the crab was jerked violently from his element and landed in the boat, claws upraised, ready for battle. Seeing Carmody, the boys rowed ashore.

"Catchin' crabs!" said one. "You want the key to the house?"

"Yes; if you don't mind."

The admiral seated himself on the skiff and started a conversation about crabs, both as to taste and quantity. "I am rather fond of them," he explained, "and my wife makes the finest crab salad in the world."

"You'd better take this big fellow along with you," offered one of the boys. "We can get a lot more; the cove's full of 'em."

The admiral accepted the crab with thanks and later sent one of the youngsters off for more ice cream than five boys and two men could possibly hope to eat.

The admiral's inspection of the house and premises was painfully like inspection aboard ship. He was as thorough, but he was swifter. The cove and boys held his interest. Presently he glanced at his watch. "We've stayed longer than I realized, Mr. Carmody. I trust the signing of the lease is a mere formality."

"Yes, sir! The papers are ready to sign, either to buy or to rent."

"How about buying this place?"

"We can give you an attractive proposition. The fleet spends a portion of each summer on Puget Sound, and one way of making Snug Harbor forever secure is to own it. Realizing your time was limited, I had two sets of papers prepared at the office, so if you decide to buy instead of lease——"

The crab, wrapped in a newspaper, was resting on the admiral's lap. There are times when silence is golden. This was one of them. Carmody had done his best; the rest was up to the cove, the boys, the leaky boat, and the crab on the admiral's knee. With the help of the boys, the admiral thought that he could tar the ancient craft some morning.

It was large enough to hold five boys and still have room for an admiral in disreputable old clothing. Hotels had been his home for more years than he cared to think, except when he was at sea. He needed a harbor of some sort to run into and a snug one. The admiral started for the automobile, still thinking. He was very quiet on the way to the real-estate office.

"Step right inside, sir!" Carmody was holding the door open. It was a quarter to four.

The manager was waiting for them as per instructions. He glanced sharply at Carmody. Failing to get a signal, he placed the lease before their client.

"Huh!" grunted the admiral. "This is a lease, isn't it? I don't want to lease; I want to buy. The cove goes with it, I understand."

"Yes, sir," said Carmody quickly; "and the leaky skiff and the dock, but not the boys. However, they just the same as go with it."

The manager jerked Carmody aside and handed him a hastily written check. "Your commission, Carmody. Say, can't we keep you here?"

"Not now, but about six months from now I'll be looking for a job, also a house and lot. I'll drop in for all three."

CHAPTER VI.

"GREAT GUNS!"

At the dock, Carmody decided he would shake hands with his client, the admiral. The *Saratoga's* boat was coming in. The craft had a habit of showing up at the wrong time, and Carmody did not wish to put Congress to the trouble of passing an act on his account. The admiral slipped a bill into Carmody's hand.

"Take it, Mr. Carmody; you have done me a real personal service to-day, and I appreciate it. You found the place I've been looking for for years."

Carmody handed the bill back. "That's all right," he said. "It is the policy of our firm to find and give people what they desire. You owe me nothing." Carmody's hands lifted and fell gently on the admiral's back. "Well, good-by, sir; hope you tie up at Snug Harbor often."

A machinist mate, stepping from the *Saratoga's* boat, gasped in surprise. Carmody might deceive others, but not him.

They had been around together too much for that. "Great guns! The cuss did it! He slapped the admiral on the back."

The admiral paused before stepping aboard the barge. This was his moment. "I'm sorry, Carmody," he said, dropping the mister, but not the twinkle of amusement in his eyes, "that you're not going to remain in the navy. With your ability, you would go far. You are like many other youngsters in the service; you think the officers don't see everything that goes on. I remembered your face instantly this morning, partly because I was struck by your appearance, but mostly because I saw you pull out a diamond ring and examine it on two occasions between shore and ship, yesterday. My regards to the lady, cox'n." Then he stepped aboard the barge.

For a second, Carmody was dazed. The admiral was en route to the flagship by the time he was fully able to think clearly again. "No act of Congress necessary!" he exclaimed. "Wow! Me for that store and the big stone for Laura!" He started off, the check from the real-estate firm in his pocket.

New Invention Wanted

THE weary tramp heaved such a deep sigh that his companion was moved to ask him what the matter was.

"I was just thinking about bad roads and the wonders of science," was the answer. "This earth is spinning round faster than a railway train behind time."

"Well, we ain't fell off yet."

"No. But think o' what a convenience it would be if we could have some place to grab on to, while the land slid under our feet, until the place we wanted to go to came along!"

Candid, Anyway

EMPLOYER: "So you are looking for a job? What can you do?"

Applicant: "Nothing in particular; but work is not so much an object as a good salary!"

HERE TO STAY

By S. Omar Barker

THE good old doughboy lingo that we used across in France,
Like "hoosegow," "parleyvoo," and "coneyac,"
Is on its woeful way to join the feel of O. D. pants,
In the limbo of forgotten bric-a-brac.

We used to talk of "Jerries" and their "G. I. cans," and such,
Of "slum" or maybe "goldfish" for our "chow,"
But wifey thinks "mitt-wobbler" is some naughty word in Dutch,
And what does "K. P." mean to people now?

"Toot sweet!" we used to tell 'em, or to "Come on, shake a leg!"
By "finee" the mess sarge meant you're "outa luck."
"Red horse" meant "corned-bill" rations, and an "oof" was simply egg,
While "private" was the pay-roll name for "buck."

Oh, of course we can't retain 'em, though we sometimes use 'em yet,
And the good old lingo's bound to pass away,
But there's one word from the army no true soldier will forget:
Good old "Buddy" 's in our talk, and hearts, to stay!

T 5 A

Crisscross Trails

By William Wallace Cook



CHAPTER XXIV.

THIEVES AT WORK!

THE room that Dick Wayland occupied at Judge Burnett's home was on the second floor. It was very much like the room Dick had occupied for one night at Idlewyld, large and airy and splendidly furnished. If Dick had been a son of the judge's he could not have been shown more consideration than he received at the hands of every one in the judge's home.

Contrary to his usual custom he slept poorly on the night that preceded the journey to Morgan Center. He was harassed by thoughts of the wrong that had been done him, and kept turning over and over in his mind even the smallest events that had to do with his last year in his native town.

He heard the great hall clock strike every hour and twisted and turned in a vain effort to get to sleep. When one o'clock chimed through the silent house, he fancied he heard a peculiar noise on the heels of the single stroke. It resembled the muffled blow of something hard upon metal.

Sitting up in bed he listened intently. Nothing came to his ears, and he fell back again. Scarcely had his head touched the pillow when once more came that weird, muffled click.

He got out of bed, pushed his feet into slippers, and drew on a dressing robe. Making his way to his hall door he unlocked it softly and drew it open. Click, click, click! The sounds were very plain to him now and came at irregular intervals.

Thieves! That was his first thought; and then he wondered how thieves could get into the house without setting off the burglar alarm. The judge had installed a very efficient electrical system as a safeguard for his rich treasure in the vault.

There had been no alarm, so how could there be any thieves? Nevertheless that click, click, click continued to come and apparently from the direction of the study.

With scarcely a sound Dick moved through the door and along the hall. The ticking of the big clock boomed in his tense ears like a drumbeat. Softly as he could, he went on and halted at the study door. It was wide open.

While he stood there, the gleam of an electric torch flashed about the fireplace end of the room. The breath hung in his throat when the flashing light revealed that the book section had been swung back, exposing the steel door. Dimly he made out two stealthy shadows at work.

He planned to creep away and secure the pistol Judge Burnett had given him and had asked him to keep in his room; and it was also in his mind to rouse Burgin quietly. Before he could do either of these things, there came the snap of a

switch and the study was flooded with electric light.

Judge Burnett was seen standing by the wall, close to one of the windows. He was in dressing gown and slippers, and he held an automatic pistol leveled at one of the two men near the vault. All were blinded for a second by the bright glare that filled the room.

One of the men was tall and lanky, and the other was shorter and more stocky in build. Both wore caps pulled low down on their brows and had on sweater coats with wide collars turned up about their ears. An open satchel was in front of the vault door.

The shorter of the two men held a steel instrument in his hand, and Dick saw him reach backward toward his hip. This man began moving forward. The judge's pistol was aimed at the taller of the two, who stood in front of the fireplace.

"Don't make a move!" ordered the judge, cool and determined. "I have caught you red-handed, and I'll shoot on the instant." Watching like a hawk, he stepped toward his desk and reached his free hand toward the telephone.

"Plug him, you fool!" said the taller of the two men, to his companion. "There's a silencer on that gat of yours! Quick, or this job's a frost!"

"Right, old scout!" came huskily from the other cracksman. He lifted a small weapon with a barrel of unusual length—the extra length being the silencer.

Judge Burnett was a brave man, but he was in a dangerous situation. There were two for him to deal with; the two were widely separated in the study, and he could not deal with them both in the brief instant of time necessary to save himself.

Dick, unobserved, had glided through the open door. Without hesitating a moment he gave a loud yell for Burgin and threw himself upon the man with the weapon leveled at the judge.

There came a spitting oath, a snarl of rage, and Dick and his antagonist fell to the floor in a wild struggle. The weapon was discharged, but there was no sound. A vase of flowers on the judge's desk snapped into fragments, and there was a crash of glass as the bullet sped on and shivered the door of a bookcase.

The taller of the two burglars made a desperate effort to reach the hall. The judge fired at him as he ran. Untouched by the flying lead, the man leaped through the open door—and directly into the arms of Burgin, the butler.

The huge colored man handled the criminal as though he had been a child. Meanwhile the judge had gone to the aid of Dick. Both were battling with the burglar when Miss Burnett ran into the room. She threw up her hands and gave a terrified scream.

"Don't be alarmed, Mollie," said the judge, breathing deeply from his exertions. "We've got the scoundrels! Calm yourself and telephone for the police."

In less than five minutes, three officers were at the front door. Miss Burnett admitted them, and they completed the capture by snapping manacles on the wrists of the two prisoners.

"By golly!" jubilated Ephraim Burgin. "If it ain't dat bogus English lord what I had mah hands on!"

"'Deacon' Steve MacGowan," said one of the officers, "and his sidekick, 'Cockney Joe!' This is a bully night's work."

MacGowan gave a sneering laugh. "You're a swell bunch of coppers," he jeered. "It wasn't your night's work, not as anybody could notice. It was the old gink gave us the bell, first off, and then that buttinsky kid from the Berkshires added the finishing touch. Say," he added to Dick, "you and me ought to be pretty well acquainted by now. Every now and then we've got a way of bumpin' together."

They were all in the study, the judge, Dick, and the butler breathing hard and recovering from their brief flurry of violence.

"They hadn't blown the door," commented a sergeant in charge of the detail of policemen, standing in front of the vault, "but they'd have been at it in another few minutes. I'm a bit surprised at you and Joe, MacGowan," he added, "pulling off a job like this with an old kit of tools. They've got torches now that will melt holes in a safe."

"Givin' me instructions for my next job, sergeant?" MacGowan inquired mockingly.

"Your next job will be something dif-

ferent, Mac. It's waiting for you up the river and will probably last for ninety-nine years."

"Thanks; you're certainly encouraging."

"How did you get in here?" inquired the judge of MacGowan.

"Judge," said MacGowan, "I've been real peeved at you since you beat me out of that diamond. I was trying to balance accounts by getting the Eye of Buddha, and a few other knickknacks. But don't ask me how I got in. The dicks will probably find out and spill the beans."

"You can at least tell me how you learned the location of the vault," pressed the judge.

"Lord Ranley called on you some time ago. All your collection wasn't in the vault at that time. You excused yourself and went out into the hall for the case of diamonds. While you were gone, his lordship made a few expert investigations and discovered the secret of the bookcase. His lordship tipped me off."

The sergeant and one of the other officers went through the house, seeking further information. They returned to report that, in their opinion, it was partly an inside job.

"One of your servants, possibly, was put here as a 'plant,'" said the sergeant. "Have you hired any help recently?"

"A chef," answered the judge.

"I'll go with the butler to talk with him," said the sergeant.

They found that the chef was missing, bag and baggage.

"I'm right," said the sergeant after he had returned to the study and announced that the chef had vanished. "He must have disconnected the burglar alarm, and very likely he admitted MacGowan and Cockney Joe."

"You guys are great little guessers," spoke up MacGowan.

The scattered tools of the burglar kit were collected and placed in the old satchel, and the officers prepared to leave with their prisoners.

"Just a minute," requested Dick. "I have seen that man," and here he pointed to Cockney Joe, "before to-night."

"Not me," said Cockney Joe. "Hit must have been some one else of the same nyme."

"It was up in Morgan Center, Massachusetts, last June," went on Dick. "I was walking along a deserted street in the dark and he called to me. When I turned around, I was struck over the head; then, while I was senseless, I was robbed of a watch and five dollars."

"It must have been MacGowan who struck you," put in the sergeant. "He and Joe usually work together."

"Think we're pikers?" demanded MacGowan indignantly. "A watch and a five-dollar bill! Sergeant, you do me an injustice."

"You had your eye on bigger loot, Mac," returned the sergeant. "What was it?"

"You'd better count me out of this talkfest," said MacGowan sourly.

"Why did you gag me, tie me hand and foot, and put me in an empty freight car?" Dick asked.

MacGowan gave Dick a steady look. "Kid, you did something for me one night, on Long Island Sound. Just for that I'm going to hand you a hot tip. Ask young Wattles why we did it; he knows. Tell that bird that Steve Faxon told you to ask him. It ought to bring something worth your while. I guess that will pay Orrie for throwing me down."

Not another word could be got out of either prisoner, and the officers left, taking both men and their burglar kit.

"I heard them at work," the judge explained to Dick, when officers and prisoners were gone, "and got into the study and to the light switch without their seeing me."

"Why did you face them alone, Hobart?" asked his sister, shivering.

"It was a case, Mollie, where I did not stop to think. Dick probably saved my life."

"I shall not rest easy another night while all those jewels are in the house!" exclaimed Miss Burnett. "I have been haunted for years by the dread of just such a thing as has just happened."

"I will make some disposition of my collection, Mollie," the judge told her, "and before many days. I confess that the ease with which MacGowan and Cockney Joe got into the house and found my steel room has alarmed me somewhat.

"For years," he went on, "I have thought my collection was securely safeguarded; now, to-night, I discover how mistaken I was. No particular harm has been done, and I have had a lesson. Dick has also, perhaps, discovered something to his advantage. Let us all go back to bed and forget about it."

CHAPTER XXV.

WHEN HE FOUND OUT.

IT was eight o'clock in the evening. Mr. Jerome Wattles, in his study, was walking up and down the room, somewhat perturbed. His son, Orrie, sat in a chair, smoking a cigarette and watching his father with more respect than was his custom.

"You are leaving to-morrow for six months abroad," Jerome Wattles was saying, "and I have great hopes that the trip will be the making of you. It's costing me a mint of money, but if you are a little more steady when you return, and show a disposition to go into the works and get familiar with the business, I shall not begrudge what I am spending on you."

"You are making a bushel of money out of that wrench," declared Orrie, "so there was never a better time for staking me to a trip to Europe."

"The wrench is going to make me a very rich man," said Mr. Wattles in a tone of deep satisfaction, "and we are swamped with orders from all over the country. The plant will have to expand—another building will have to be added. I am counting on you to learn the business, Orrie, so you can step into my shoes when the time comes for me to quit."

"I'll buckle down to real work, governor, after I get back from across the water."

Mr. Wattles halted in front of his son and regarded him fondly. "There has been a decided change in you during the last few months," said the father. "You have given up those visits to New York, and it has been a long time since you have drawn on me for any extra funds. It is because of your changed attitude that I am financing this trip of yours."

"Have you got on the track of that man Faxon yet?"

A troubled look crossed the face of Mr. Wattles. "That fellow is certainly a mystery. I can't understand him at all. Prentley's letter, saying he did not know of any such man and had never given him a letter of recommendation, gave the affair a queer look. But the wrench was a good one; I secured the patent without trouble, so everything must be all right. Nevertheless, the mystery surrounding Faxon bothers me at times. I——"

At this moment he was interrupted by a servant who announced two callers. There was one card, and Mr. Wattles knitted his brows over it. The name on the card was this: "Mr. Hobart Burnett."

"I had a letter from that man," remarked Mr. Wattles, "which does not make me feel at all well disposed toward him. The letter was not a pleasant one. I suppose, though, I shall have to see him."

Orrie turned pale and would have beaten a hasty retreat from the room. He was not quick, however, and encountered the callers at the door leading into the hall. "Dick Wayland!" he gasped.

"We want to see you a moment, Orrie," said Judge Burnett, "and your father, too."

Orrie began to tremble. "I was just going out to keep an appointment," he mumbled, "and——"

"You will have to forgo the appointment," the judge told him sternly.

"May I ask, sir," said Jerome Wattles, "why you speak to my son in such a tone?"

"You may," was the judge's answer, "if you are Mr. Jerome Wattles."

"That is my name."

"Dick," requested the judge, "introduce me."

"My employer, Mr. Wattles," said Dick, "Judge Burnett, of New York."

Dick was clad in better clothes than Orrie had ever seen him wear. He had prospered in New York, that was evident.

Orrie was greatly worried. He feared this call had something to do with the affair of the diamond. One reason he wanted to get away to Europe was because his conscience troubled him, and he had fears that some shady transactions of his past might be discovered.

Then, too, he was constantly in dread of MacGowan, whose evil influence had done him so much harm.

"What I wish to inquire about," proceeded the judge when they were all seated in Mr. Wattles' study, "is the Sure-grip Wrench which you are marketing. Is it for sale?"

Orrie was relieved in one way, but depressed in another. He felt a sense of guilt at mention of the wrench, although he was pleased that the diamond did not seem to be the object of Judge Burnett's call.

"I wouldn't sell my rights in the article you mention for one hundred thousand dollars," said Mr. Wattles. "It has been an instant success, and I shall have to enlarge my factory to take care of the orders that are rolling in on us."

"That is excellent!" exclaimed the judge, smiling. "I have to tell you, sir, that the wrench you are manufacturing was the invention of my young friend here, Dick Wayland."

Orrie cringed.

"Impossible!" exclaimed Mr. Wattles. "Dick claimed to have invented a wrench, but I never saw it."

"Here is where your son comes in," said the judge. He turned to the nervous young man. "Orrie, why was Dick Wayland bound and gagged and put in an empty box car by Steve MacGowan and Cockney Joe? Faxon requested Dick to ask you that question."

"How—how should I know?" stammered Orrie, feeling as though the floor was sinking under him.

"Faxon?" echoed Mr. Wattles. "Stephen Faxon? Why, he is the inventor from whom I bought all rights in the wrench."

"Exactly," said the judge; "and Stephen Faxon is none other than Deacon Steve MacGowan, a notorious confidence man who has just been captured in New York. MacGowan, I will say for your benefit, is the man who struck Dick down that night when he lost the wrench he was bringing to you."

"Then," cried Mr. Wattles, betrayed out of his usual calm, "you mean to infer——"

"I will infer nothing," interrupted the judge, "but we will have the truth from your son's lips." He turned to the young man. "Orrie," he went on, and his voice was kindly, "we are not here to threaten you, but merely to see that justice is done to Dick. Speak frankly, and you will find that both Dick and I are your friends."

Orrie was in a tight corner. If he refused to tell what he knew, then the judge and Dick were possessed of information regarding his New York exploits which would get him into deep trouble with his father—and perhaps with the police. He would rather his father knew the secret history of the wrench than the secret history of Judge Barnett's missing diamond.

"Orrie," demanded Mr. Wattles, "have you anything to say?"

"I—I was deceived in Faxon," began Orrie, "just as you were, governor. I met him casually in New York as MacGowan."

"Go on, Orrie," spoke up Dick.

"It was the night of the dinner at the country club," proceeded Orrie desperately, "and I was put out because you refused to fix that flat tire for me. I had heard you were working nights in the shop, and after the dinner and the dance, I got the governor's keys and went to the shop. I found your drawings."

"What did you do with them?"

"I met Faxon as I was leaving the shop and he—he took them away from me."

Mr. Wattles listened in amazement.

"What happened after that?" queried the judge.

"I—I don't know."

"Then I will tell you that part of it. MacGowan discovered, in some manner, that Dick was to keep an appointment with your father for the purpose of showing him the wrench. Did you tell MacGowan?"

"I—I overheard the arrangement between father and Dick," said Orrie uneasily, "and I may have mentioned it to MacGowan."

"That was enough for MacGowan. He had his partner, Cockney Joe, with him; and those two scoundrels ambushed Dick when he was on his way to keep his appointment with you, Mr. Wattles. Now we come to the point. Orrie, why was

Dick gagged, bound hand and foot, and put in the freight car? Buck up! Do one good act, and see what a pleasant feeling it will give you."

There was nothing pleasant in all this for Orrie. He was fairly caught and there was no way out except by telling the truth. "MacGowan wanted Dick out of the way so he could sell the wrench to my father."

"And he did sell the wrench to your father—Dick Wayland's wrench?"

"Y-yes."

"And he and Cockney Joe ambushed Dick for the sole purpose of getting the wrench which Dick, in good faith, was bringing to show your father?"

"Yes."

In justice to Mr. Wattles it must be said that he was horrified. Never, in all his honorable business career, had he been entrapped in such a vicious tangle. "You knew all this, Orrie," he cried, "and never told me?"

Orrie's voice shook as he answered: "I owed MacGowan a gambling debt, and he threatened to go to you with it if I said a word! Dad! I couldn't help what I did! And I couldn't help the robbery, although I didn't know MacGowan and Cockney Joe had planned to rifle your safe."

"Then, during your frequent trips to New York, you had burglars and confidence men and gamblers for your associates?" asked Mr. Wattles in a terrible voice.

Orrie broke down.

"Go to your room!" his father ordered. "I will talk with you later."

Mr. Wattles was so shaken by his son's revelations, and had been so plainly the victim of cunning deception, that both the judge and Dick felt sorry for him.

"I assure you, Judge Burnett," said Mr. Wattles, when Orrie had staggered from the study, "that I am hearing these terrible things for the first time. I have been the innocent victim of a sharper. The patent on the wrench stands in my name, and already I have put a great deal of money into manufacturing it. What can I do, in the circumstances?"

"Only one thing, as an honorable business man, Mr. Wattles," answered the judge. "Make restitution."

"How?"

"You have said that the patent is worth at least one hundred thousand dollars. Dick, I know, does not want to be hard on you. Pay Dick fifty thousand dollars for a half interest in the wrench, take him in as a full partner, and keep on with the manufacture."

Mr. Wattles paced the floor while he considered the suggestion. "If I accept your terms," he said presently, "will all these matters we have been discussing be treated confidentially?"

"Absolutely."

"Then," agreed Mr. Wattles, "if you and Dick will meet me at my lawyer's to-morrow, partnership papers will be executed, and I will pay Dick the money. I try to be a just man——"

"You are proving that, Mr. Wattles," said the judge, rising and offering his hand. "You are doing the right thing and the just thing. With what we know, we could proceed at law and recover all rights to the wrench for Dick. But he prefers to be generous with you."

"I have always respected Dick and had faith in him," returned Mr. Wattles. "He will be getting better than twenty thousand dollars a year as his share of the profits from our partnership."

"I have always had faith in you, too," said Dick, taking his prospective partner's hand cordially. "No one blames you for anything that has happened, Mr. Wattles."

"I am glad you feel in that way," was the answer.

The judge and Dick took their departure; and what passed between Orrie and his father after they left the house, no one but Orrie and his father will ever know.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WHAT A CHANGE!

MORGAN CENTER had another sensation. Dick Wayland had come back from New York. With him had come a New York magnate who was his intimate friend. Dick had deposited fifty thousand dollars in the Morgan City bank in his own name.

He had become a partner of Jerome Wattles in the ironworks. He was going to live in the old home town again and

superintend the manufacture of the Suregrip Wrench!

This is what passed over the backyard fences, was discussed in stores and on the street, and was phoned up and down and across the community.

"Dick Wayland! Well, I swan! Why, he ain't much more than a boy; and to have all that money—I declare, it don't seem possible! Made it down to New York? How, for goodness gracious? He ain't been to New York for much more'n a year."

"Well, I'm glad it was Dick Wayland, anyhow; industrious, square as a die, and one of the best lads that ever lived! Why, I knew him when——"

These are samples of the general comment. Judge Burnett was visiting at the Vincents', and Dick had put up at the Bramble House. "Hi" Bagby, editor of the *Weekly Trumpet*, went over to interview Dick; and Dick, the center of an admiring crowd in the hotel office, modestly confirmed about nine tenths of the gossip.

The partnership papers had been drawn up according to agreement and signed by Dick, after the judge had looked them over. Mr. Wattles gave Dick a check for fifty thousand dollars—a check that made the eyes of the cashier of the bank pop when Dick opened an account and made the deposit.

The cashier, all smiles, reached out his hand to grasp Dick's warmly. He had shaken hands, in a perfunctory way, when Dick first came up to the window, but this second handshake was out of tribute to the big check and Dick's financial standing. Money always means a good deal to some people.

Everybody Dick met was more than friendly. If he had been a war hero returned from across the seas with medals all over his coat, he could not have been more warmly welcomed.

"Oh, well," said Judge Burnett fondly when Dick called on him at Mr. Vincent's in the afternoon, "Dick is a fighter, Arnold. He fought for fortune and, in the course of that battle, passed through privations and showed as much moral courage and genuine ability as any soldier that ever faced an armed enemy."

"Knew he'd come out on top!" declared Mr. Vincent.

"What I regret is," mourned the judge, "that I've got to lose my private secretary. Dick's place is here, of course; he is well off already for a young man, but his fortune is bound to grow by leaps and bounds as a partner of Jerome Wattles. I can't stand in Dick's way."

"Judge," said Dick with feeling, "you have been the best friend I ever had. It is hard for me to think of leaving your employ."

"Business is business, though," returned the judge, "and for some years you must keep your eye on the main chance. What are your immediate plans, Dick?"

"I'm going to buy back the old home, the home father had to sell when he met with business reverses. That has long been a dream of mine."

"You are now in a position to realize some of your dreams, and I commend your plan to recover the old homestead. But you will have to have some one to look after your domestic affairs for you."

"I've thought of that. Aunt Martha, Uncle Abner, and Cousin Emily will move from Albany and take care of the house for me. I'm giving Abner a job in the works, a job that will pay him twice as much as he receives as night watchman."

"Splendid!" approved the judge.

"Orrie Wattles has changed his mind about taking a trip to Europe, and he is going into the shop. He asked me for a job this morning."

Mr. Vincent laughed. "That was a singular proceeding. First time Orrie ever asked to be allowed to do hard work. Wonder how he'll look in overalls? I can't imagine it."

"There has been a big change in Orrie," said Dick earnestly.

"Must have had a lesson of some kind," guessed Mr. Vincent. "Kitty had an idea that she might be able to make something of him. Everybody said that, with his frequent trips to New York, he was going to the dogs; everybody, that is, except Orrie's father. Jerome Wattles seemed to be blind—indulged Orrie too much. A good many fathers do that very thing, judge."

The judge nodded gravely, but not one

word escaped his lips, or Dick's, concerning the real cause of Orrie's change of heart. Dick was beginning to understand why Kitty had been seen so much with Orville J. She had hated to see a young fellow wasting himself as Orrie had been doing.

"But Kitty had to give up the job," Mr. Vincent went on; "Orrie was more than a handful. Since he was too much for my girl to handle, I am mighty curious as to what at last brought about his reformation."

"I suppose so," assented Mr. Vincent; "it must have been something like that."

Dick had driven up to the Vincent home in a shiny automobile, a roadster hired at the local garage.

"Is that your machine, Dick?" Vincent asked.

"It's a hired machine," Dick said. "Mr. Ormsby, at the garage, gave me the best car he had."

"Dick is going to have a car of his own," asserted the judge, "and it's going to be a good one."

"It is going to be a five-passenger car, judge," Dick remarked, "so I can take my uncle, aunt, and cousin out for some rides when they come to keep house for me."

"Thinking of others, eh? That's like you, Dick. Sounds odd, but the surest way for a man to get ahead in this world is to show consideration for others. There's a Slave of the Lamp that lights the way for young fellows of that kind. Noticed it, Vincent?"

"Now and then, judge," was the answer. "The rule, it strikes me, doesn't always hold good. Take Jerome Wattles, for instance. I don't think Wattles ever put himself out to do an unselfish, generous thing. But he is strictly honest. Like Shylock, though, he would have his pound of flesh if honestly due him. And Jerome Wattles, Hobart, is the richest man in town."

"Rich in money," said the judge, "but not rich in spirit. I'm always sorry for the man whose dollars are a burden to his soul; he misses the finest things in life, things that money cannot buy."

"You hold a brief for the other side, Hobart," continued Vincent. "In school, everybody used to say that you were too generous for your own good. It was pretty hard sledding for both of us; but I can remember when you turned over your last dollar to a poor man—a tramp, I think it was. And now look at you! You could buy Jerome Wattles a dozen times over."

"Perhaps," mused the judge; "but I've been a miser, too. I have hoarded a lot of useless diamonds and rubies, and only in recent years have I awakened to the fact that I have been foolish and unwise. Perhaps—who knows?—Jerome Wattles also has had his eyes opened!"

"I'll believe that," said the practical Vincent, "when I see it."

Just here Kitty Vincent, handsomely gowned and radiant, tripped into the room. "Sorry to have kept you waiting, Dick," she told him, "but I'm all ready now."

A very odd thing happened when Kitty and Dick, at the end of their drive, came back through the edge of town on their way to the Vincent home. They had a blow-out, and a forward tire went flat. Dick immediately slipped into a dust coat and began changing the tire. He had on a fine suit, but that fact did not seem to bother him.

Just as he began to work he heard a quick footfall behind him, and looked around. Orrie Wattles, clad in his usual fine raiment, was at his side. "Let me bear a hand, Dick," Orrie requested. "I'll take off the old tire while you are getting the spare."

"I can handle this, Orrie," said Dick cheerfully.

"I can help—come on."

Orrie did his full part. When the small job was finished, he stood to one side and lifted his hat to Kitty as the car moved off.

"I guess," observed Kitty, "that if any one doubted there had been a change in Orrie, the way he buckled in to help you fix that tire proves it."

"He's all right at heart," answered Dick; "I always knew it."

THE END.

Menace of the Man-Wolf



By William Merriam Rouse

(A NOVELETTE)

CHAPTER I.

WITH BARED FANGS.

THE loup-garou, or man-wolf, as it is called, is an idea. It cannot be said, however, that it is no more than an idea; nor, on the other hand, would it be entirely prudent to make the bold statement that every man who does not do his religious duties becomes a loup-garou.

According to the assertions of many, a man who does not go to confession at least at Easter for seven years turns into a wolf by night thereafter—a wolf of unimaginable ferocity, whose only hope of liberation as he ranges the woods is that he will be wounded by the hand of man. That alone will set him free, it is said, and that is the reason why men are so often attacked by these unfortunate ones.

It was to be expected that the people of Lac St. Jacques would believe in the loup-garou, for the village lies far north, even beyond the railroad, and at the time there was no priest there. It was one parish with Ste. Flavie, where the church and *presbytère* were.

The winter of the loup-garou was exceedingly severe. Snow lay four, five, and six feet deep upon the long, narrow fields which the habitants had cleared. The fences were hidden completely, and in the forest where there is neither wind nor sun the snow was even deeper than in the open. The oldest men in the parish could not recall a colder winter.

Amédée Cloture was the first to raise the cry of loup-garou. Although every one was ready to admit the possibility of the man-wolf, there were a few in the beginning who thought it was an ordinary wolf.

Cloture came staggering home to the village one afternoon, just at dark, so palsied with fear that he could hardly manage his snowshoes, and burst into the blacksmith shop in a manner to silence the gossip there instantly.

His muffler was torn open at the throat—not untied, but hanging in shreds—the mitten was gone from one hand, and there was crimson upon his fingers. As for his face, it was the color of the face of a dead man. Except for his eyes, one might have thought him a walking dead man.

"The loup-garou!" he gasped, when he could speak. "It has come to Lac St. Jacques! *Mon Dieu Seigneur!*"

This was something to stir the hearts of the men there and to chill them, too.

It appeared that Cloture had been coming in from the woods when he met the monster, and he was armed only with the long staff which he used for measuring. If he had been carrying his ax, he might have wounded the beast and given it release, when it rose out of the ground in front of him with eyes of fire and a mouth flame red, its fangs bared.

It seemed to him that he fought for hours, holding off the attacks of the loup-garou with the stick, until his arms were so tired that they seemed ready to separate from his body.

At last it had him down; its breath was upon his face and its teeth at his throat. Then he closed his eyes, believing that the end had come, and prayed. The weight that had held him half buried in the snow was suddenly removed.

When he opened his eyes, there was nothing to be seen of the man-wolf. Cloture rushed swiftly away, coming to the blacksmith shop of Urie Legris, mayor of the village and leader in most of its affairs, still shivering with fright.

The story was well started when in came young Valère Turcot, breathing hard as though he had been running, but with a smile upon his good-natured face. He was a fine-looking man, in love with life and as active as a sled dog. The smile deepened as he listened, spinning the bar of a vise as though the loup-garou were nothing to him.

"It was at the corner of your field that it happened," concluded Cloture, turning to him. "Parbleu! I would not cross that field again to-night! No; not for the best farm in the parish!"

"Poof!" exclaimed Turcot. "Without doubt it was no pleasant experience, Amédée, but you are more scared than hurt! It was a wolf made mad by hunger that attacked you! This is a hard winter in the forest, my friend!"

CHAPTER II.

SOMETHING OF A HERO.

At the moment, Cloture was too shaken to do more than to snort incoherently at this discrediting of his great experience, but the other men there raised a cry of protest, and grizzled, iron-muscled Urie Legris took up the defense at once.

"Don't talk like a crazy man, Valère!" he growled. "Whoever heard of a single wolf coming out of the forest to attack a man? By threes, they will attack and in the woods and at night; yes! But, *sacré!* Either this was the true loup-garou or there is no such thing!"

An older man than Valère Turcot, or one less impulsive and brave, would have kept silent; but to youth, folly comes naturally.

"Name of a dog!" he exclaimed. "Of course there is no such thing! It is the talk of old women!"

"No such thing as the loup-garou!" squeaked old Jean-Baptiste Papineau, who had been living in Lac St. Jacques since before any one else could remember. "Me, I remember Tacite Grouard, who became loup-garou and was killed by the blow of an ax in the hands of François Paradis. He dragged himself back to his own doorstep to die, and there the monster was found in the morning, frozen so that he was as brittle as ice!"

"You mean that a dead wolf was found on the doorstep!" declared Turcot, grinning.

"Ah, no! I mean that François Paradis fought with a man-wolf and hit him with his ax! I mean that Grouard was found dead and frozen with just such a wound as Paradis had given the beast! That is what I mean! And there were wolf tracks halfway from the forest to the house!"

"I thought the loup-garou could not be killed with anything except a silver bullet, *mon vieux,*" said Turcot gravely.

"You are making fun of me!" snapped Papineau. "Just because you have been to Ste. Anne de Beaupré and to Quebec and Heaven knows where else! Nevertheless, it is true that only a silver bullet will slay the monster. In this case, you see, he was wounded by man, became a man again, and died afterward of the wound. It is quite plain and simple for those who have any intelligence at all!"

The men about the shop nodded and muttered approval although they did not let their tongues loose like the old man. Valère Turcot was a person of some con-

sequence. He had a good house, a good piece of land, and Thérèse Legris, the daughter of Urie, was betrothed to him.

They were to be married in the spring, and it seemed destined that Turcot should grow rich, raise a fine family, and eventually become the mayor of Lac St. Jacques.

"Valère," said Legris, kicking with much displeasure at a pile of horseshoes, "it seems to me that you are exceedingly foolish. An evil-minded man might even say that you were the loup-garou from the way you came bursting in here after Amédée and the insane things you have said. It is well known that a witch will deny the existence of witches! And, tell me this, if there is no such thing as a loup-garou, then why does all the world believe that there is?"

"All the world does not!" replied Turcot stoutly. "In a city——"

"That is because there are no forests in the cities!" croaked old Papineau. "The loup-garou lives in the forest. It is perfectly simple!"

"Ask Father Côté!" cried Turcot.

"He will agree with you," declared Cloture bitterly. "Was there ever a priest who admitted that the devil had any power?"

"You are not the man to appeal to Father Côté!" barked Legris. "How long is it since you have been to Ste. Flavie to church?"

"Yes!" cried Papineau, whose ancient being was now warming to anger. "How long since you have confessed yourself, infant? Is it, by any chance, a matter of seven years?"

Valère Turcot changed color and laughed and regretted somewhat that he had begun the argument, for he could not remember when it was that he had last made confession. In far places men become careless, and it is the women who hold them to their duties.

It was a good twenty miles to Ste. Flavie and Turcot had been an orphan for ten years. He told himself that when he was married to Thérèse he would settle more seriously to the business of so living in this world that he would be prepared for the next.

"He can't answer!" triumphed old Papineau, with a degree of malicious pleasure. "It is always thus with these children under thirty who know more than the rest of the world!"

Turcot thought it an excellent time to leave, particularly as he had no desire to get into a quarrel with his father-in-law, yet he wanted to carry the affair off jauntily. So at the door of the shop he turned and hurled a last defiance at old Papineau. "It's seven years since I've been to church, Jean-Baptiste! Smoke that with your *tabac Canadien!*"

It was a foolish thing for him to say, yet nothing might have come of it if the matter of the loup-garou had rested where it was. All the world went out next day to Turcot's field and there found ample proof of the story of Amédée Cloture. The snow was trampled over a great space; there were tracks of a creature much bigger than the ordinary wolf and scattered bits of the knitted muffler. One does not tear up a serviceable muffler merely to make a good story, the habitants decided. Amédée Cloture had certainly been in danger of his life.

He became something of a hero. He told the story often, and it lost nothing in the telling. The good people of Lac St. Jacques were seized by a fear that struck to the marrow of their bones.

CHAPTER III.

A TERRIBLE ACCUSATION.

IT was Thérèse Legris who made Valère Turcot take the matter of the loup-garou with a degree of seriousness. He took her and her little sister, Rosine, out to the trampled spot where Amédée Cloture had fought his fight, and as they walked back home Turcot saw that Thérèse's blue eyes were clouded with trouble.

She was of that delicate beauty which the clear cold of the North so often produces when it deals with a woman of purely French extraction—black hair, eyes of a living color, and skin like white porcelain, touched with pink.

"Never should you have laughed, my dear," she said gravely. "My father is angry. Others say that you are mad—foolish—Heaven alone knows what they say!"

"Eh bien!" he exclaimed. "I will keep

a weight upon my tongue for your sake, but it annoys me that grown men should be so stupid. You, Thérèse, you do not believe in this fable with the others?"

"Promise me, Valère," she said softly, without replying to his question, "that you will go to Ste. Flavie to church with me at the end of Lent!"

Turcot laughed and swung little Rosine up in his arms, higher than his head. They were the best of friends, these two, and Rosine already regarded Turcot as a brother.

"Do you hear that, my Rosine!" he cried. "Your very beautiful sister thinks that I am the loup-garou! Shall I promise her? Certainly! A man who is going to be married should make his peace with Heaven as well as his wife!"

"Tell me, Valère," said Rosine, "why is the loup-garou?"

"There is no such thing in all the world, my little one!"

"Do you hear that, Thérèse!" exclaimed Rosine. "And my brother, he knows more than any one else!"

"It does not matter," said Thérèse, "for I know that Valère is not the monster. He is too strong and brave and good! That is enough!"

"I shall get such ideas out of your head," declared Turcot. "On our wedding journey we will go to Quebec and you will learn, my angel, that the old women's stories of Lac St. Jacques are laughed at there."

"Quebec!" she murmured. "I wish that time were here now, for—I am frightened!"

"Nonsense!" Turcot laughed. "We are the happiest people in the world!"

It seemed, after a day or two, that Valère Turcot had the right of the matter. Although the women and children of the village did not go out of doors after the early dusk had come, and the men went armed by night if they walked abroad at all, nothing happened for nearly a week.

Then, just as the people were getting ready to smile at their own fears, the monster struck a second time. Strangely enough it was Jean-Baptiste Papineau, the most firm believer, who was attacked.

One evening he heard sounds of distress from his pig. Forgetting the loup-garou, Papineau rushed out into the darkness. A terrible shape, which he said afterward was as big as a well-grown calf, bounded toward him in the starlight—a creature with gleaming eyeballs and a strength and power beyond that of any wolf which Papineau had ever seen in all his years in the woods.

It bore him down, it tore at his throat, and but for the courage of Céleste, his wife, that would have been the end of him. She had lighted a lantern and was following him when the attack came.

She rushed forward and thrust the lantern into the face of the beast. Both she and her husband swore, calling all the saints to witness the truth of what they said, that the loup-garou vanished in a flash of light as the devil's own should.

Céleste managed to drag her husband into the house. She barred the door, and they waited, shivering with dread, through the long night—afraid to go for help and in terror at every crack of a frost-bitten timber.

The throat of Papineau had been torn, but as none of the wounds were deep, and as he was tough from many years' seasoning by whisky *blanc* and tobacco, he was able to sit in his chair next day and receive the village of Lac St. Jacques.

The tracks of the man-wolf led to the back door of Valère Turcot's house.

There was, therefore, a double sensation in the village. Up to this time the more level-headed people had thought that Turcot's professed nonbelief was mere bravado; now, they found something more sinister in it.

When Turcot hurried to the *maison* Papineau with expressions of sympathy, the terrified old man pointed a wavering finger at him and made an open accusation.

That was enough proof for the villagers. Who ought to know, if not the man who had nearly lost his life? The pig had escaped unscathed, which proved that it was no wolf. The tracks were conclusive.

In vain, Turcot, arguing with Legris, pointed out that the wind had blown hard during the night and that tracks leading away from his house were filled in. Turcot said that the wolf had prob-

ably wandered to his house and away again before attacking Papineau, that it had been frightened at the lantern and so had failed to get the pig.

"Confess, Turcot!" urged Legris. "Admit that you are accursed, and let us take you to Ste. Flavie. Perhaps something can be done. Do not persist in clinging to this madness!"

"I tell you again and again that there is no such thing as the loup-garou!" retorted Turcot stubbornly.

Urie Legris went away, muttering, and later Thérèse came without the knowledge of her father to beg Turcot to yield to the pressure of the village and go to Ste. Flavie with half a dozen men as an escort and let Father Côté settle the matter.

"Never!" cried Turcot. "Why, Father Côté would laugh at them, and all the world would look upon me as a strange animal from that time forth! Neither you nor I would ever hear the last of it! This madness will pass shortly. I myself will kill this wolf, and when I have nailed the pelt to the side of my barn, they will call me a great hunter as loudly as they now call me a devil!"

CHAPTER IV.

CRAZED BY HATE AND FEAR.

THAT night Valère Turcot patrolled the single street of Lac St. Jacques with his rifle until nearly dawn. He knew that people would watch him from darkened windows, but he did not know that he had done himself only harm by his bravery. That he was not afraid of the monster proved more conclusively than anything else that he and the monster were the same. Old hunters who had fought the she-panther with nothing but a knife would not have dared to invite an attack from the loup-garou.

Two nights of this and then, just after dark and when Turcot was still sleeping in preparation for his vigil, the end came. The distance was so short between the house of Urie Legris and his blacksmith shop that Rosine had been allowed to continue her custom of bringing him home to supper, in spite of the fear that was upon the village.

Urie himself heard her cries and found her a hundred yards from the shop. She was dying.

"Valère——" she whispered, and that was all.

It was enough. Legris did not stop to think that naturally the name of one of those whom she loved best would have been the last upon her lips.

Upon Valère Turcot the tragedy came like a thunderbolt. He awakened to find the hands of Thérèse shaking him. She was sobbing, bareheaded, crying out fragments of prayers as she begged him to fly for his life.

Turcot was dressed except for his sheep-lined coat and his shoepacks, and he stumbled awkwardly into them at her commands before he became awake enough to understand more than that some dreadful things had happened.

"They are coming to kill you, Valère!" she moaned. "Oh, try to understand me! Rosine has been killed! Just now! Hurry, Valère, or they will surely kill you!"

He was in the kitchen in a moment, still struggling with the dead weight of sleep. He lighted a lamp, slung his snowshoes over his shoulder when Thérèse thrust them at him, snatched his rifle and a box of cartridges.

Then the door burst open, and the room was flooded with men. They growled that growl of the mob, which is like nothing else in the world. At sight of Valère those in front bore back a little, all but Urie Legris, and wavered and snarled.

Their faces were made black and terrible by hate and fear. The whips of fear made them press forward, a hundred times more dangerous than the truly brave, for the brave always have mercy in their hearts.

For Legris, the leader, there was some excuse in that hour. Of the two children who were all that were left to him, one lay dead in the snow, and the other was clinging to the man or devil who, he believed, was responsible for the death of her sister.

"Beast!" cried Legris in a voice that was not human. "Devil! If you can still pray, make your peace with Heaven now!" Get away from him, Thérèse!"

Legris leaped and struck with an iron

bar which he carried in his hand. Turcot caught the blow upon his gun barrel, jammed the butt into the stomach of Legris, and leaped into the middle of the human pack, striking right and left.

They gave before him, as much from fear as because of the blows. The room cleared. Legris staggered to his feet, and Turcot hurled him through the door with a well-directed kick. Turcot turned, panting, and saw Thérèse leaning against the wall with her hands over her ears.

"Come!" cried Turcot. "Come with me, Thérèse, where there are civilized people!"

For an instant she seemed to hesitate, holding out her hands toward him. Then she shrank against the wall again, shaking as with a chill from head to foot. *"Dieu Seigneur!"* she moaned. "Oh, my Valère, I love you, but I cannot!"

CHAPTER V.

LEAPING FLAMES.

BROKEN glass sprinkled upon the floor of the room, and a bullet flattened against the wall behind Turcot. From outside, the voice of Urie Legris came, roaring orders.

"Fire the house, Cloture! You, Tite Fessette, go to the front side with half a dozen men. And come on now, mes braves! I'm going in there again!"

"Thérèse!" cried Turcot. "It's death to stay another minute! Will you come?"

He saw flames leaping up about his outbuildings, heard the cries of the animals. What devils these human beings had become! The girl sank down upon the floor and hid her face.

"I cannot!" she sobbed.

"Then let them finish it!" cried Valère Turcot in a voice that filled the room and pierced with its sharp agony all the medley of other sounds. He turned and walked through the house toward the front door deliberately, as though there were nothing in the world to hurry him. As he went, he began to laugh.

Peal upon peal of laughter left his lips, struck bell-like through the night as he went out, and for an instant held motionless the men bent upon his death. His strange laughter held them until he got out into the road.

Then the pack was after him. It seemed to be a game for him; he fired at them, ran, and turned to fire again. A mob is neither brave nor steady, and they wasted much powder that night without doing more than to lodge a few bird shot in Turcot's sheepskin coat.

They followed him to the woods, but when he knelt behind a tree there at bay, they drew off and returned to the burning of his house. He watched the glare upon the sky for a long time, muttering to himself and now and again throwing his rifle up to his shoulder as though he would send a futile bullet in the direction of Lac St. Jacques.

Back there in the village the red rage burned down with the fire and became embers. When nothing but the bare stone walls and the chimneys of Valère Turcot's house were left standing, the men of Lac St. Jacques sneaked home, avoiding each other, ashamed, relieved, fearful more than a little of what might come upon them for that night's work.

Urie Legris went back to his stricken home grimly, half carrying the daughter who was left to him, but who did not seem now to be wholly alive.

News of the disaster traveled swiftly. Before the end of a week, Father Joseph Côté made the long trip from Ste. Flavie to look into the tale of sudden death, burning, and attempted murder that had reached him. It did not take him long to get at the truth, and he made the ears of that little village ring, its cheeks burn with shame.

In vain they swore to him that the devil had indeed taken possession of the soul of Valère Turcot and that he still came back by night to torment them. The priest assured them that they were much better savages than Christians and that with all speed they would make amends to Valère Turcot.

The second night of Father Côté's visit was clear and fine, and a huge moon floated in the sky. It was almost as bright as day.

Father Côté and Urie Legris were sitting in the dark *parloir* of Urie's house, the priest letting the memory of the mayor's loss somewhat modify his admonitions. Suddenly Legris sprang up with a cry of terror.

"Look!" he cried. "There is the devil that has taken the life of one of my children and destroyed the happiness of the other! Now perhaps you will believe, mon père!"

There, running along the hard-packed snow, was a creature with the form of a wolf, but much larger than any wolf the priest had ever seen. The animal stopped and looked back along the way he had come.

"Get me your rifle!" said Father Côté. "I'll soon show you whether this is wolf or devil!"

Before Legris could turn to obey, a man bounded into sight and stopped a dozen feet from the wolf. A knife gleamed in his hand, but otherwise he was unarmed.

"Madness!" breathed the priest. "That beast is the grandfather of all wolves, and he is crazed with hunger or he would never have come here!"

CHAPTER VI.

NOT THE SAME MAN.

THE wolf sprang, and together man and beast went down in the road. They tumbled over and over, locked together, and at the end of a time that seemed unendurably long the man rose to his feet. The wolf lay still. His conquerer began to drag him by the hind legs toward the house of Urie Legris.

"No!" whispered Legris, gripping the arm of Father Côté. "That is not a human being—that out there! Keep him out, mon père!"

"Come with me!" thundered the priest. "The bravest man in this parish is going to do you the honor of entering your house!"

He dragged Legris into the lighted kitchen. Thérèse sat there alone, listless as she had been ever since the night of the attack upon Turcot and the death of Rosine. She sprang up as they rushed into the room.

Legris stood paralyzed, staring at the door. Father Côté took down the bar and stepped back, waiting. They heard the sound of steps crunching upon the snow, slowly, retarded by a dragging weight; the latch lifted before their strained gaze. Then the door was flung open and Valère Turcot staggered into the room, pulling after him the carcass of the wolf.

Turcot had been wounded; the stout sheepskin of his coat was slit and torn. His eyes looked dead and sunken, and when he spoke there was no more life in the tone of his voice than there was in his white face.

"There is your loup-garou," he said, "and here am I, Valère Turcot. We are not the same. Voilà!"

He turned to go, weaving upon his feet. He did not seem to see Thérèse, although she held out her arms and would have gone to him at a word.

"My son!" cried Father Côté. "Wait!"

Turcot turned and stared at him, but without any emotion whatsoever. Let the head of a snake be cut off, and the body will respond to a touch long afterward. Thus it was with Turcot. The priest shuddered.

"Valère!" Thérèse had found her voice. "You—you are going away."

"Why not?" The lips which framed the words were those of Valère Turcot, but that was not the voice which Thérèse had known and loved, the voice which had rung so cheerfully in Lac St. Jacques.

"Forgive me!" said Thérèse, taking a step toward him. "Forgive all of us, Valère!"

"Forgive?" he echoed, looking at her as he might have observed a stranger. "I am not angry."

She stood silent then, amazed, helpless, suffering.

"He has gone mad!" muttered Urie Legris. "More than any one else I am to blame, and I will take care of him as long as he lives."

"I am not mad," said Turcot. "I am dead."

"Ah, *Dieu Seigneur!*" moaned Thérèse, now convinced that his mind was gone. "I have deserved this, perhaps, but he—he has not!"

"At least stay here with your friends," said Father Côté, soothingly. "You have proved, and with great bravery, your case against the people of Lac St. Jacques. Urie Legris and I will see to it that amends are made to you in all things. Thérèse loves you, my son. There is a long life of happiness awaiting you, with

many children and the blessing of Heaven."

"Ah, yes!" cried Legris eagerly. The thick and hairy blacksmith, of an extraordinary roughness, became as penitent as a child who has been bad. "Every man, woman, and child in this village shall do you honor, my son! You shall become mayor at once! Your house shall be rebuilt better than ever!"

"Valère!" Thérèse went to him and lifted one of his torn, crushed hands, lifted it and held it against her lips. She smiled at him bravely, but there was no answering smile in his eyes, no pressure of the fingers. She let his hand fall and drew back, frightened. "Either he is mad," she sobbed, "or he no longer loves me! He hates me—all of us!"

"I hate no one," said Turcot slowly. "I love no one. Why do you bother me, you people?"

"Mad, of a certainty!" muttered Legris.

"At least stay with us," said Father Côté. "Have pity upon those who love you and who suffer because of that love!"

"That," replied Turcot in his flat voice, "is nothing at all to me. Why should I care?"

"Ah!" murmured Thérèse. "He does hate us!"

"I hate no one; I love no one—nothing. I have a good cabin in the woods."

"Wait!" cried the priest, as Turcot turned to go. "For the sake of your soul, my child! To forgive is to be forgiven!"

"How can I forgive when I am not angry?" asked Turcot. "As for my soul—it is like the loup-garou. I cannot find it—nor can you. You chatter. *Bon soir et bonne nuit!*"

He was gone, leaving them there with the dead wolf and the memory of a living dead man.

Legris made the sign of the cross. "It is the work of the devil! The loup-garou——"

"Stop!" cried Father Côté. "Have you not had enough of such superstition? Oh, mon Dieu! Do you not see that the folly of this belief in the man-wolf has in truth made you people of Lac St. Jacques like wolves? Yes; and you have made a wolf of this man! His soul sleeps with a deep sleep! If this wolf of your own creating does not turn upon you it will be nothing less than the mercy of Heaven!"

Father Joseph Côté spoke true words. The people of Lac St. Jacques made ample repentance, but their repentance could not restore to Valère Turcot that which they had taken from him.

CHAPTER VII.

BACKED BY SHOTGUNS.

TURCOT lived in a chopper's cabin that had been abandoned, a good five hours' march from Lac St. Jacques. He ate and slept, but in that way alone could he be said to be like other men, for he felt nothing at all.

He protected his body from the cold and fed it mechanically, but without interest in what he was doing. He went on like a toy that is wound up and cannot stop running, because it is wound up.

Turcot felt no emotion. Hate, love, fear, regret, hope, anger, greed, sorrow, desire—all were strangers to him. He realized this and did not care, because he could not care.

As the body is sometimes numbed by a dreadful wound, so his soul had been made numb by the events of that night when everything had been taken from him in a little ten-minute interval.

When Thérèse had said that she could not go with him, a strangeness had taken possession of his being; the morning after that night he had found himself in the cabin where he now lived, wrapped in a calm that was like the stillness of a thick fog. Nothing penetrated it.

Through the months that followed the slaying of the great wolf, Thérèse Legris and her father and the people of Lac St. Jacques did what they could; which was nothing in the nature of real help to Valère Turcot.

They restored his house, and it remained empty. Legris let out his land, but the money for the crops remained unused under the floor of the Legris kitchen with Urie's own hoard. Nothing could be given to a man who desired nothing.

White threads appeared in the hair of Thérèse Legris, grew into a broad white

band that ran back from her forehead, and made her more beautiful than ever. She remained unmarried, nor would she become a *religieuse* as some counseled. She was betrothed to Valère Turcot, she said, and if ever it pleased *le bon Dieu* to restore him to her, she would be ready.

Ten years passed, and in that time the people of Lac St. Jacques had largely forgotten their sin against Valère Turcot. He did not come to the village, but his story was so well known that it ceased to be of interest.

The youngsters spoke of him with a laugh, unreproved, and the older people with a shrug. Only Thérèse and her father cherished him in their hearts and Urie alone, of all those who had wronged Turcot, went once each month to see that he had met with no harm.

Time at length brought another hard winter, as bitter as that of the loup-garou, to the country beyond the rivers. The snow lay deep, great branches cracked in the frost, and the starved wolves grew so bold that they ventured into the villages by night. With it all came another evil, worse than cold or wild beast; an unseen enemy against which little but the help of God would prevail.

Variole—a virulent disease—appeared and went from choppers' camp to farm and village with the swiftness which the scourge knows so well how to manage. Before there was any warning in Lac St. Jacques, a woodsman came home to the village, moaning as he used the last of his strength to drag himself to his door.

The next day he was dead. Three cases appeared on the same day, and the village knew that it was laid by the heels.

There was no doctor in Lac St. Jacques, and no supply of medicines to meet an emergency like this. In such situations whole villages had been reduced to a dozen survivors. Urie Legris, therefore, put a horse to his *traineau* and started for Ste. Flavie, where it was likely that he could at least get proper medicines.

A mile from Ste. Flavie, Legris was stopped by two men, armed with shotguns—men who stood well away from his sleigh, with their guns held in readiness, and told him that he must go back the way he had come.

Ste. Flavie had escaped so far, and there were certain of the people who intended to take no chances; they would not even part with a share of such remedies as they had. Legris was sure that Father Côté did not know what was being done, but he could not get to the priest.

Legris turned back, dazed by the picture which his imagination created of the fate of Lac St. Jacques. It would be bad enough with a priest to give courage and a doctor to give medicines; without either, the coming weeks promised a nightmare of hopeless death.

CHAPTER VIII.

"NO BETTER THAN WOLVES!"

BACK into his doomed village drove Urie Legris. At his coming the people ran out, bareheaded, coatless, following the sleigh with shouted questions which grew more urgent as they were not answered.

Urie Legris kept silence. He wanted to say it once and be done with it. So he looked straight ahead, whipping his horse, until he drove into his own yard.

He could not meet their eyes as they crowded about him. Slowly he kicked himself out of the robes, put aside the hands that clutched at him in an effort to make him speak, and walked up to his doorstep where he could face all of his people at once.

They were all there, even to children carried in the arms of their mothers, except those already stricken by the *variole*. Thérèse came out and stood beside him; he could feel her hand seeking his as he stared into the faces of those who waited.

"They turned me back with guns at Ste. Flavie," he said thickly. "They will not let any man go there from a place where the scourge is. They will not give any help at all!"

A dark and heavy silence rested upon the people for the length of time it would take a man to count ten. It was that long before they realized the fullness of despair, understood clearly how cut off they were from human aid.

Then they knew that before a messenger could make a journey to a place more distant than Ste. Flavie, they would

have suffered the worst of the disease. A groan of anguish came from the people of Lac St. Jacques, as though from one throat.

"Fine Christians, they are!" squealed Jean-Baptiste Papineau, now so old and bent that he could not do without an extra leg in the form of a cane.

"No better than wolves!" yelled Amédée Cloture. "We ought to go there in the night and take what we want!"

"There's nothing in that, worse luck!" growled a man next to him. "They outnumber us, three to one!"

The people muttered sullenly, began to grow savage and snarling from fear. Urie Legris looked upon them with sorrow and with understanding. He was thinking in that moment of the quality of mercy which he and the rest of them had shown Valère Turcot on that winter day ten years before.

He glanced along the road that stretched white and gleaming toward the woods, rubbed his eyes, looked again, and choked back a cry that rose in his throat. Valère Turcot had come back to Lac St. Jacques.

"Look!" cried Legris hoarsely, as he pointed. "There is the man whom we, like wolves, tried to kill ten years ago this winter! The same mercy that we showed him is the mercy of Ste. Flavie now, in our time of need! It is the judgment of Heaven!"

Along the road came Valère Turcot, older but unbent by the years, with the same blank look of indifference upon his face. With him came back to Lac St. Jacques the memory of what had been done to him.

The people huddled together, desiring greatly to flee behind closed and barred doors and yet not daring to leave the protection of each other. A whole village drew in upon itself, shivering, terrified by the memory of a living sin.

On and on came Valère Turcot, with strong, slow steps, until he was close enough for them to see his lusterless eyes. Then he stopped and stood with his legs braced apart, his rifle in the crook of his arm, his face as expressionless as the stone wall of a house.

"Valère," said Legris, after a minute, as he felt the fingers of Thérèse dig into his arm. "We are outcasts now, as we once made you an outcast!"

Turcot stared, then moved his shoulders indifferently. From a trapper he had heard that the *variole* was in Lac St. Jacques. He had not cared at all, either to rejoice or feel pity, but in the cold depths of his being something had moved him to go and look upon the death and suffering of those who had taken away from him everything which made him human.

There in the village, gazing at them and hearing the words of Legris, he felt no hot flush of satisfied vengeance, no joy, no triumph.

"It is nothing," Turcot said at last, speaking with the difficulty of one who rarely uses his voice.

Suddenly Thérèse Legris flung herself down from the doorstep and ran between Turcot and the cluster of her people who stood in the shadow of death. She dropped to the snow, upon her knees, and raised her hands to Valère Turcot.

"You can help us!" she cried. "They will let you go into Ste. Flavie, for you have not been in our houses here, and you will not carry the scourge! You can bring us Father Côté—he will give you medicines! You, of all the world, can help us! Have mercy!"

The men and women and children of Laç St. Jacques stirred. They moved a little forward, hesitatingly. A woman knelt beside Thérèse and held out toward Turcot the baby that she carried.

Then, by twos and threes and half dozens, the people of Lac St. Jacques fell upon their knees and silently implored the mercy of that one to whom they had shown no mercy.

For many seconds, Valère Turcot stood facing them like a man of ice, giving no sign. Then, slowly, the long numbness that had held his soul as winter holds *beau* Canada melted. A strange, ancient feeling touched his breast, his throat. Hot tears blurred his eyes.

"Thérèse!" he cried, and his voice rang joyously as it had in the former years. "I—I will go!"

She leaped up and ran to him, with the true light of heaven shining in her face. "Thank God, my well beloved!" she cried. "Thou art a man again!"

The Might That Failed



By C. S. Montanye

AFTER entering the sanctum of McGuire, the sporting editor of the *Morning Call*, Stanley Stanton paused expectantly. His chief, wading through some copy, looked up and nodded.

"That you, Stanton? Oh, yes!" McGuire turned to some notes beside him and reached for his cigarettes. "Did you ever happen to hear of 'Foxy' Finnegan?"

The youngest reporter on the sporting page smiled. There were few who were unfamiliar with Finnegan. The man was one of the cleverest managers who had ever taken an unknown boxer and made a champion of him. McGuire saw that the reporter had heard of the manager.

"Finnegan's in town again with a new white hope," said McGuire. "He's always worth a half column just on the strength of what he's done. You'd better take a look at the new world beater."

"What is he—a welter, sir?"

McGuire fingered a green eye shade. "A light-heavy who answers to the name of 'Battling' Brannigan. Foxy's got him planted as a prelim in a Harlem sport club next week. Listen to everything he has to say, but take it with a grain of salt. By the way," McGuire considered the cub reporter's tall, sinewy figure thoughtfully, "didn't some one tell me that you box a bit yourself?"

"I did—a little," Stanton answered. "And I keep in condition."

"Then you ought to know the game pretty well. Let's see. It's after ten now. You're likely to find Foxy at Held's Gym from now until noon. You'd better snap right up."

In the outer office, Stanley Stanton collected his headgear and sought the harried pavements of Park Row. The day was late March in a spring mood. He felt that he would have liked to walk all the way up to Christopher Square and the gymnasium, but recalled the need of haste and so took the Third Avenue elevated.

As he rode uptown, Stanton thought of the odd twist of fate that had placed him on the sporting sheet. When he had first come to the *Morning Call* from Minneapolis and the leading paper in that city, he had done some play and book reviewing—stodgy, uninteresting work for one who yearned for the excitement of the baseball stands, the smoky ringside, the football gridiron, the ice rink where hockey was king. Twice he had made efforts to be transferred, but both times had failed.

Then Quinn, the boxing expert, had jumped to another daily, there had been a shake-up all along the line and, as luck would have it, Stanton had been relieved

of writing about highbrow literature and drama.

From the first his interest had been such that McGuire had nodded sagely at his copy and had made a mental note that Stanton gave promise of being as competent a man as Quinn. He gave the young man more important assignments —the basketball game between Brooklyn Tech and Baltimore Institute, sent him up to the Garden as assistant cover man for the six-day grind, jumped him to Lake Placid for the big midwinter carnival, and then had him review the ice-boat races on the Shrewsbury.

Several times the sporting editor had considered raising Stanton's salary and would have had it not been for an unwritten law of the sporting sheet. This was that no cub reporter could benefit financially before he had won his spurs through his own efforts and in such a way that his paper was definitely benefited. Nevertheless, McGuire knew the young reporter was earning more than he actually received.

Stanton alighted at the proper station and headed west. Christopher Square was in an old section of the city where tenements and factories flourished like weeds in a neglected garden. Held's Gymnasium was at the extreme end of the square, housed in a shabby brick antiquity with unwashed windows, time-worn steps, and an unlatched front door.

In and out of this temple of slam, visitors came and left at will. There were no rules to observe, no doorbell to ring or custodian to question.

Stanton pushed the front door open and stuck his head in. Nobody was visible. He entered and caught the drone of voices coming from behind closed doors down a short corridor beyond. Near these doors a young man in a faded sweater lounged on a three-legged stool, reading a pink trade paper, and occasionally removing the cigarette that dangled from his lips.

"Is Mr. Finnegan around?" Stanton inquired.

The man looked up. "Yeah. Inside, bo."

The reporter tried the knob of the door, found it was unlocked, and stepped into the gymnasium. The first thing his gaze fell upon was the tall, bullet-headed figure of Battling Brannigan. Stanton seemed to know he was looking at Foxy Finnegan's white hope even before the other was pointed out by one of the loungers. The reporter stared with frank curiosity and narrowing eyes. The big boxer, he saw at once, was anything save prepossessing. Brannigan had a low, bulging brow, glittering eyes, a twisted nose, and a cauliflower ear. He was typical of the boxers pictured by cartoonists.

II.

TURNING from Brannigan, who was skipping rope with the deft agility of a schoolgirl, Stanton recognized the rotund Finnegan, champing on a cigar and watching his protégé as a mother hen might a favorite chick. As the reporter went over, Hurley, of the *News*, lifted a finger and introduced him.

"Glad to know you," the genial Foxy murmured, shaking Stanton's hand. "So Quinn's left the *Call*, eh? I hope McGuire gives me as good a break as when Quinn was down there. As I was telling the boys, I've got the future light-heavy champ of the world under contract. Yes, sir; Battling Brannigan is the biggest discovery I've ever made in all the years I've been digging 'em up!"

"There ought to be a story in where you discovered him," Stanton murmured.

Finnegan grinned. "There ought to, but there ain't. Brannigan came to me. He asked for a chance to show his stuff, and once I lamped it I threw a contract at him. I believe he hails from the sticks, but that don't cut any ice. This boy fights like a mad tiger, is as good with his left as his right, loves punishment, and has got a disposition as mean as a treed cat. What more can you ask?"

Hurley and several others laughed.

"Who's the victim next week, Foxy?" asked one of the listeners.

Finnegan puffed on his cigar. "A bim they call 'Lucky' Watson—one of the push-overs in Murray Bain's stable. He'll be lucky if he escapes with his life, believe me. I only framed the bout to show my friends what I've got. Brannigan will K. O. him in the first chapter. Wait and see if he don't."

Stanton hung around, watching, but

said little. At length Brannigan, finished with the bag, put on the gloves with his sparring partner. Stanton waited until the exhibitions were concluded and went back to Park Row, where he found the sporting editor of the *Call* lunching at his desk.

"Well, what kind of a wiz has Foxy now?" McGuire asked. "Something marvelous, I suppose. Finnegan usually picks winners."

Stanton handed over his copy—what he had hammered out after mentally shaping it up on his way downtown. "Personally, sir," he began slowly, "this Battling Brannigan failed to impress me as being remarkable. He has a flashy style and a terrific wallop—when he gets it over. He's clumsy, however; he's no boxer, and I feel confident he can't take punishment. Hurley of the *News* and the others seemed quite enthusiastic. If you run my write-up there's apt to be some discussion. I wrote what I think, and the truth is seldom pleasant."

The sporting editor, running his eyes over the typewriting, chuckled. "Good stuff, Stanton! Whenever it's possible to be unusual in the newspaper game—be unusual! If the other sheets all have a puff for Battling Brannigan, our knock will stand out twice as strong. A discussion creates interest, and I like your barbed-wire adjectives. It might be a good idea to get the dope on Lucky Watson. Ordinarily, a preliminary fight of this kind isn't worth a hoot. But inasmuch as Finnegan is concerned there'll be a lot of our readers anxious to learn what he's got. See Murray Bain and write an article."

"I'll interview him after lunch, sir."

McGuire pushed up his green eye shade. "Look here, Stanton! You've got the makings of a first-class sport scribe, and I'd like to see you get ahead. Perhaps you're familiar with the rules here that a cub reporter has to turn in a scoop or give us a break on a feature before he receives a raise in salary. Just keep that in mind and don't overlook any side bets. Maybe you can dig something out of this scuffle that will give you your boost. Who knows?"

Stanton went up to the headquarters of Murray Bain that afternoon, but learned that Lucky Watson was laid up with a touch of grippe and that unless he made a rapid recovery, Bain intended to cancel the bout with Battling Brannigan.

III.

THE following morning, when Stanley Stanton made his way across Christopher Square, he encountered Hurley in the act of leaving Held's Gym. The *News* representative, a man in the late forties, shook his head with genuine sorrow.

"My boy, I'm afraid you're due for not a little unpleasantness," said Hurley. "That stuff you wrote yesterday hasn't helped your popularity any with Finnegan and the bunch inside. In fact, I understand Brannigan is slightly red-headed because of it."

Stanton shrugged. "Every one's entitled to his own opinion, isn't he?"

Hurley glanced at his watch. "Certainly. But why be so caustic in your comments? You could have panned Brannigan without getting in under his skin. If I didn't know that you had only met him yesterday, I'd be forced to think you had a grudge against him."

Once inside the gymnasium, Stanton noticed the hostile atmosphere. Several of the big light-heavyweight's handlers gave him baleful glances; they whispered together at his entrance, and somebody laughed. The reporter crossed to the window where Foxy Finnegan, his round face ornamented with another cigar, stood staring out. The manager turned at his approach.

"Oh, so it's you?" Finnegan frowned. "Much obliged for those slams you put over yesterday. Er—if you'd assure me that McGuire was responsible for most of those dirty digs maybe I could cool Brannigan off. As it is, he's so sore that he says he's going to take you if he ever runs into you again. I told you he had a mean disposition. Now, if you will say that——"

"I can't," Stanton interrupted. "Mr. McGuire had nothing to do with what I wrote."

"Then," Finnegan snapped, "take a tip from me and blow before my boy shows up. Understand, I'm not ordering you out. I'm just suggesting it."

"Inasmuch as that's the case," the reporter remarked, "I'll stick."

Finnegan shrugged and turned away. Stanton realized the significance of what he had said when Battling Brannigan appeared a half hour later. The light-heavyweight, flashily attired in a form-fitting suit of green serge, a chamois waistcoat, and a brown derby, hurried in, looked around, saw Stanton and, accompanied by a stir of interest, went directly over.

"What a swell nerve you've got!" the boxer snarled. "Not satisfied with writing all that guff yesterday, you've come back for more, have you? Put up your dukes and take it. I don't let no one write lies about me for any one to print in any newspaper."

With his hands in his pockets, Stanton looked into the sneering face of the boxer. "I'm sorry I can't oblige you. I haven't any inclination to stage a battle with you—now. I'm here, representing the *Morning Call* and——"

"Yeah. And I know why! You're getting set to rip me up the back again and kill me off before I've even got a chance to show this town how I can strut my stuff. I wouldn't be surprised if Lucky Watson's crowd was paying you to dope this jazz. For the last time—put up your hands!"

"Easy, easy there!" the rotund Finnegan broke in. "You can't hit a defenseless man——"

"Who says I can't?" Brannigan bellowed. "I got witnesses who heard me warn him. I've told him to stand up to it, but he's lily-livered and yellow. So he gets cuffed, defenseless or not! Let this teach him that he can't get away with more lies! How do you like this sort of——"

Brannigan uppercut with his right and crossed with his left. Stanton, hands still in his pockets, crumpled up as if he had been shot.

An hour or so later he presented himself at McGuire's desk and laid down his copy. The sporting editor considered him keenly.

"What's the trouble? You look rocky. And what's all this?" His gaze darted to the typewritten sheets before him. "'Battling Brannigan, Foxy Finnegan's New White Hope Beats Up *Call* Reporter Who Maintains Discovery a False Alarm!'" He read on in a silence broken only by chuckles. "Stanton, it looks as if we were building a mountain out of a molehill. So far, so good. This stuff is O. K., but we've got to look out for an anticlimax. What we need now is a punch, a finishing stroke, the O. Henry twist for a curtain."

The reporter smiled faintly. "I think I have that, sir. As you know, Lucky Watson is laid up with grippe, and Mr. Bain wants to cancel the bout with Brannigan. I'm going uptown directly to see if I can't make him change his mind and accept a substitute for the bout with Brannigan. I think I can."

The sporting editor looked up inquiringly. "Substitute? Have you got some one in mind to fight Foxy's find? If so, who is he?"

Stanton ran his fingers gingerly along the left side of his jaw. "Myself! Not only have I a score to even up, but I remember what you told me about not overlooking any side bets, sir!"

IV.

FINISHED with the rubbers in the basement dressing room of the Harlem A. C., Stanley Stanton threw a bath robe over his ring togs as Murray Bain, tall, thin, and kindly eyed, stepped in from the corridor.

"Your bout, kid. Brannigan's just gone up. All right, boys," said the manager to the bucket brigade.

Two minutes later Stanton climbed through the ropes of the ring, his impression that of being on an island surrounded by a sea of shifting smoke through which the ghostlike faces of the audience glimmered. He went directly to his corner, accompanied by Bain and his seconds, rubbed his shoes in the resin box, submitted to an examination of the bandages on his hands, and listened to the voices of the spectators that were like surf pounding on a rocky shore.

Then Murray Bain shoved a rubber tooth protector in his mouth and leaned over. "You're doing this, you seem to know what it's all about, and it's your fight. But one word of advice, Stanton. Don't carry the fight to Brannigan and

don't mix it at close range so he can slug you. The way to beat him is to wear him down, box him!"

After a short time, the gong rang a number of times. The ring was cleared and an announcer addressed the crowd.

"In this corner, Battling Brannigan, the Man Killer of the Ozarks! In the other corner, 'Fighting' Stanton, the Pride of Park Row! Six rounds! Light heavyweights!"

Stanton saw that Brannigan intended to make short work of him. Battling rushed out of his corner, his crooked mouth twisted in a sneer, his arms swinging like flails. Stanton side-stepped, parried the attack, boxing lightly, and circled the other, jabbing at long range.

"Stand still, you cake-eater! Stand still, and let me lay you like a Persian rug! So you're the substitute who——"

Brannigan's sentence was clipped short by the glove that slid up to his mouth. Growling throatily he bored in, hooking and swinging in an endeavor to land a slumber punch. Stanton retreated in the face of the offensive, covering up, content to block until the first fury of the assault waned. Then he felt the ropes against his back and heard the roar of the crowd demanding a knock-out.

Stanton weathered the storm, the first violence of the onslaught fading. Brannigan slowed up. Stanton jabbed his way out from the ropes, stung his antagonist with a smart left to the jaw, and broke away from close confinement that meant toe-to-toe slugging. The sneer had left Brannigan's crooked mouth, and his lips were straight and grim. A baffled fury lighted his penetrating eyes, and Stanton fantastically remembered what he had written about him.

Could Brannigan take punishment? Could he stand up, every nerve strained to the breaking point, before terrific punching and still struggle on until raw courage and nothing else remained?

Stanton judged that possibly sixty seconds of the round were left. Brannigan missed a straight to the head, stumbled in closer, and hooked with his left—a punch duet that left him wide for the counter. Stanton saw his opportunity and seized it quickly. Feinting with his left, he shot his right up and over to Brannigan's jaw—everything he had in it. Then, in the same dizzy instant, he drove his left to the solar plexus and stepped back.

With his arms dropping limply to his sides, Battling Brannigan swung around, toppled over, and buried his face in the canvas!

Ten or fifteen minutes later McGuire pushed a way into the dressing room and regarded his cub reporter with pursed lips. "I suppose," he began, "you're writing up this fight yourself."

"I'd like to, sir," Stanton answered.

The sporting editor inclined his head. "Sure; go to it! But just a suggestion. I've had this Brannigan looked up, and I've found out that for the first time in his career Foxy Finnegan has had the wool neatly pulled over his eyes. You've fulfilled the unwritten law, and you'll get your raise all right, so make this assignment worthy of it. Play up the fact that Brannigan's no novice in the game, that he was in trouble with the boxing authorities in Minnesota, and at last had to leave there under another name because of crooked fighting. By the way—you might tell me where you learned to use your hands so scientifically!"

Stanley Stanton smiled. "Before I went in for reporting, sir," he explained, "I was the amateur welterweight champion of Minnesota. And—and I've got an awfully good memory for faces!"

A Well-paying Accident

GEORGE: "How did Tomkins get so smashed up?"

Jack: "He was run over by a motor car."

"He seems cheerful about it."

"Yes; he thinks he'll get enough damages to buy a car of his own."

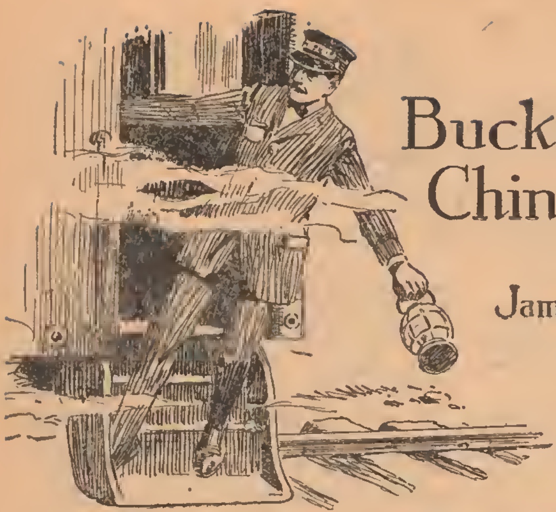
Just the Same

THE irritable old man had been complaining about the food and the service ever since he had entered the restaurant. "Here, waiter, are these pork or mutton chops?" he asked.

"Can't you tell by the taste?"

"No."

"Then what does it matter?"



Bucking the Chinless Wonder

By James W. Earp

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

WARNED TO WATCH OUT.

WITH a heavy heart, Mike Magee left the office of Superintendent Pratt. Outside on the platform, Magee's brakeman, Jeremiah Higgins, waited to hear from the lips of the red-headed, two-fisted giant conductor of the Marland Branch passenger run the outcome of the interview.

"Well," Higgins inquired in anxious tones, "what'd the boss herder want to talk to you about?"

"Cash fares!" Magee snorted. The snort was similar to the exhaust of a Mikado-type engine on a steep grade with a heavy drag. "The 'Chinless Wonder' reported me for not cutting a cash-fare slip for each individual, instead of lumping them together as I did the other night and has recommended my immediate discharge."

"The sneaking coyote!" Higgins raged. "The crawling rattlesnake!"

For the next few minutes the brakeman aired his opinions of Nathan Goodwill, general passenger agent, better known as the Chinless Wonder, in language that made up in heat what it lacked in elegance. "And is the boss herder gonna stand for it?" Higgins asked, when he had exhausted his stock of expletives.

"No," replied Magee slowly. "He told me to go back on the run and see if I couldn't keep Nathan's spotters from getting anything on me. He just wanted me to know that they're on my trail and for me to watch my step."

"Which proves what I already knows," muttered Higgins. "The boss herder is some white guy. But I don't see how the gent with the minus chin got hep to the dope."

"Spotters," Magee explained briefly. "Spies are riding our train, looking out for mistakes we make, and reporting them to Nathan."

"This chinless gent is sure some rattlesnake in human clothes then!" Higgins grunted. "But if I ever get half a chance, I'm gonna ruin the rest of what little chin he's got left. I'll learn him to make trouble for a friend of mine."

Higgins paused to bite off a fresh chew from his plug of tobacco. Magee, occupied with his own gloomy thoughts, nodded absent-mindedly.

"Well," said Higgins, after a lengthy silence, "from now on, we'll keep our weather eye open for this spotter gent. And if we catch him at his dirty work, we'll put our brand on him. Personally, I speaks for the first crack at him."

In spite of himself, Magee smiled. There was no mistaking the earnestness in the voice of the former bouncer for "Dutch" Charlie's Thirst Emporium. Magee's fingers gripped his brakeman's coat sleeve.

"You're a good sport, Jerry," he said in husky tones, "and you get the first

crack at the fellow, if we find him. But from now on, we must watch our steps."

That night, as Magee worked his train with Jerry Higgins at his heels, he closely scrutinized each and every passenger in the hope of detecting something which might afford him a possible clew to the spotter's identity. If there was a spotter on the train, his methods defied detection, however.

In the smoker, a sprinkling of miners were bound for Coaltown and its orgies. They greeted Magee with something akin to respect on their smudge-lined faces.

Back in the chair car were several passengers, principally three Mexican hombres and their wives and many children. It also contained the Reverend Mr. Potskill, who did evangelistic work throughout the mining district, and the man who sat with him—evidently an outsider, this fellow. Magee looked with suspicion upon the stranger as he shook hands with the minister. The Reverend Mr. Potskill was a kindly soul and entitled to every man's respect. That his creed was different from Magee's made no difference to the red-headed giant.

"Still here, I see," said the minister with a smile. "I was afraid you had been frightened off the run. I am very pleased to see it is not so."

"I ain't the scaring kind," Magee returned with a broad grin. "The only thing that'll make me get off this job is my bosses."

"Let us hope that will never happen!" said the minister earnestly. He fumbled for his clergy certificate to present with his ticket. "You are a missionary that has been sorely needed on this job. A militant missionary, it is true," he added with a smile, "but a missionary, nevertheless. May your days be long with us."

"Thanks, reverend." Magee's hamlike hand stayed that of the minister as he sought to drag forth an unwieldy pocketbook from an inner pocket in order to get his clergy certificate. "That's all right. I know you've got it."

"But I'll show mine to prove that I have one," said the minister's seat companion as he handed up a ticket of like kind.

"Brother Lane, Mr. Magee," said the minister. "He also is a worker in the Lord's vineyard."

With one flirt of his hand Magee absolved Brother Lane of suspicion and the trouble of showing his certificate.

Back in the smoker, Magee checked up his tickets while he talked. "Don't think we've got any spotters on to-night, Jerry. I didn't see nothing suspicious, did you?"

"Nary soul," mumbled Higgins. "But did you see the shoes on that fellow in the back end of the car? I never seen such toothpicks in all my born days. A fellow must be crazy to wear shoes like that."

"Style!" Magee grinned. "I'll bet a dollar he's got a girl in Coaltown that he goes to see."

"She must be some girl!" remarked Higgins. "I wouldn't wear shoes like that to please the Queen of Shebang. Maybe he's a spotter. I'm always supicioning guys what try to do things too stylish."

"Too timid and too quiet!" Magee declared. "Nope, Jerry; spotters ain't built on timid lines at all. I'd a heap rather suspicion the guy with the Reverend Potskill."

CHAPTER II.

FROM THE CHINLESS WONDER.

It was with a whimsical little smile that Superintendent Pratt handed Nathan Goodwill's latest letter to Mike Magee. "The G. P. A. seems to have taken a fancy to your run lately, Mike," Pratt observed quietly. "This time, he says you are not examining the clergy certificates of those supposed to have them; also, that you are careless in handling passes. He says numerous other things —read for yourself."

Magee read. Then he muttered softly under his breath. The last paragraph of the letter was a knock-out. It read:

> All signs point to the evident fact that this man is incompetent as a passenger conductor. I recommend that he be replaced by a competent man at once. I hope I shall not have to insist on this too strongly.
>
> NATHAN GOODWILL.

"All right!" growled Magee, inwardly boiling. "I'll get off the run. I'll admit that there's a lot of things I don't know about passenger work, but I ain't on there for show, that I know of. My idea of

why I was on there was to collect them fares that nobody else has ever been able to do, until me and Jerry took hold. But I'll get off. I won't be rawhided by the Chinless Wonder and his bunch of sneaking crooks. I'll quit first."

"Hardly, Mike," Pratt remarked in those quiet tones that could mean so much. "You are too good a man for me to lose like that. I think I told you once before that, while Nathan handled the passenger department's end of the game, I handled my own men in my own way. You go on back to work as if nothing had happened. When I want you off that run, I'll ask you personally, without consulting Nathan."

Magee turned away. He was at the door when Pratt's voice stopped him.

"By the way, Mike," said the superintendent, "here is another communication for you, affecting your brakeman. I leave it with you to handle as you see fit. I rely on your judgment in the matter."

Not until he was down on the street did Magee glance at the letter. Then with one angry whoop he made for Bradley's Pool Hall, where he knew he could find Higgins playing Kelly pool. Higgins was just draping his giant frame over the pool table when Magee banged his way in. Without looking up Higgins made his shot and pocketed the winning ball. Then he looked up and grinned.

"Pardner, you look like you was on the warpath. What's Chinless been doin' now?"

"Read that and weep!" commanded Magee.

Higgins read, but wept not. Instead, he called down blessings on Nathan's ancestry even unto the sixteenth generations before Genesis. The letter read:

> Brakeman Higgins is reported to be chewing tobacco while on duty—this in direct violation of Rule H. Heretofore, we have consented to overlook this, on account of Higgins being new to the service, but henceforth he must live up to all the rules or else be dismissed. This seems to us only further proof of Magee's unfitness for the position he now holds, and he should be held responsible for his brakeman's future conduct. I hope I shall not be forced to call your attention to this fact again.
>
> NATHAN GOODWILL.

"Why, the—the old coyote!" Higgins sputtered in his wrath. "I wouldn't give up my chawin' terbaccer for all the cushioned-broncho jobs in the world. Where my plug ain't, I ain't—and that's final! I'm no lady's man. I'm a real he-cowpuncher from Oklahomey, and I don't care who knows it. But why does they pick on you, pardner?"

"Because I'm the conductor," Magee replied with a sigh. "And he's always responsible."

"And you mean to tell me I gotta quit chawin', if I expects to work with you?"

Magee shook his head sadly.

"Well, I ain't gonna give up my chawin' for nobody; that's all there is to it," Higgins growled. "I'll quit first. You say what you want me to do."

"I can't say," Magee declared with a shake of his red head. "I'm like the fellow that had the bear by the tail. I don't want to hang on, and I don't dare let go. One way, I lose my job—the other way, I lose you. And I don't want to lose you. I think too much of you."

Higgins gulped back a lump in his tanned throat, his face a study in emotions. It was more than a minute before he held out his hand to Magee. "Pardner," he said huskily, "you ain't gonna lose me. I likes my chawin' better'n I like most anything else, but if you say I gotta——"

He broke off the sentence with a savage snort. Magee's hamlike fist was holding Higgins' in a mighty grip.

"I can lick the man that says you can't chew tobacco as long as you work for me," said Magee hotly. "As long as I'm boss you chew tobacco. When somebody else is boss, you can do as you please. And that goes double!"

"And I'm gonna lick the man what is doin' the tattling, if I ever find him!" Higgins promised. "And from now on, I'm gonna live for one thing—finding that same gent."

CHAPTER III.

HIT HIM FOR ME!

IT was Saturday night, and the two dinky coaches that did service between Pineville and Marland were loaded to capacity with the usual travelers for Coaltown. Magee had long since finished his collecting of tickets and was

engaged in winding up his reports, when Higgins slammed through the door to sink down in the seat at the conductor's side.

"I've found him!" the brakeman whooped joyously. "I've got the maverick what has been runnin' loose all this time and makin' us a peck of trouble. Now, all I ask of you is that you say the word, and I'll burn my brand on the critter."

Magee put aside his work and rose to his feet. "Are you sure, Jerry?"

"As sure as I am that I'm me," was the big brakeman's assertion. "And don't forget that you promised me first crack at him."

"But are you positive?" Magee insisted. "We don't dare make a mistake, you know. We must be sure, before we make a move. Where is he, and what does he look like?"

Higgins waited until he had added another chew to the one already in his mouth. "Back in the chair car. And he looks like he always does, only he's got on better clothes than usual. But them pointed shoes are just like they was when we first saw him."

"You mean the guy with the girl at Coaltown?" came dazedly from Magee.

"The gent! I knowed from the start he was no good. No guy what tells tales is any good. And any guy what would try to keep another from chawin' terbaccer can't be any good. Can I beat him up on the train, or will I have to wait until he gets off?"

"One minute," begged Magee, holding out a restraining hand to the restless brakeman. "Give me all the dope first. How did you find it out?"

"Well, it's like this," said Higgins. "I am standing back there, havin' a little chaw all to myself, when I see this guy write somethin' in a little notebook what he has in his hand. Now, that alone don't make no noise with me, nor when he hauls out a cardcase and takes a stamp out of it to put on the envelope what he puts this note into after he tears it out of his book."

"Maybe he was writing his girl a note," Magee suggested. "He might have been, Jerry, you know."

"That don't interest me none at all, pardner," declared Higgins. "But what does interest me and makes me ask the reason why is that this gent pays out good money for round-trip tickets when he has a railroad pass in his pocket all the time!"

Magee straightened in his seat. "What's that? A pass?"

"You said it, pardner. One of them nice yellow ones what says you can ride all over the Texas, Kansas & Pacific without paying. When he hauls out that cardcase, the pass falls out on the floor. I gets a good look at it, before he picks it up. I even got to read the printin' on it, so I knows I'm right. I was gonna bust him then and there, but I was afraid I might do some damage to the furniture, so I thought I'd come up and see what you had to say."

"Yeah," agreed Magee. "Sure." He scratched his head thoughtfully. "We got to figure a way to get to him. We don't dare beat him up on the train, unless we got good reason—and that ain't reason enough."

"Nothin' says I can't get off the train somewheres and do it?"

Magee made his decision then and there. "The very thing!" he exclaimed. "To-night you're going with this guy to call on his girl. Somehow, I don't care how, you get left at Coaltown with him. And if you don't hit him two times in the eye for me, don't you come back here to me!"

"I'll be back, pardner," Higgins promised. "If I don't come back, send a wagon after both of us, 'cause he won't be back either."

"Leave your uniform cap and coat behind when you go," Magee said, as the train slowed down for Coaltown. "You mustn't have anything to show that you work on a railroad. And try not let him know who you are, if that's possible—which isn't, I don't suppose. And whatever you do, don't kill him outright—just beat him up good."

"Pardner, leave that to Jeremiah Higgins from Bitter Creek, Oklahomey. No man can try to take my chawin' away without gettin' hurt."

That night when the train left Coaltown, Jeremiah Higgins was not on board. Neither was the man with the pointed shoes.

CHAPTER IV.

TAKING A DARE.

ONE hundred and sixty men in varying stages of inebriety were waiting on the station platform when the train stopped in front of the depot on its return trip. One second later, one hundred and sixty men were fighting madly for the right to be the first man in the car, with the odds in favor of those who had succumbed the least to the temptations of Coaltown. With the more sober ones the winners by a large margin, there came the task of getting those who were in the condition most nearly approaching perfect paralysis on board the train.

Nowhere to be seen was Higgins, however. Nor was the gentleman with the pointed shoes in sight. Now and then, Magee ceased his search of the rapidly thinning crowd to aid some almost helpless workman to make the grade up the steps leading into the car. Just as he was beginning to have the first cloud of worry, he caught sight of a much-bruised and battered individual making his way across the platform. The man was unrecognizable as to appearance and clothes—but the pointed shoes were unmistakable.

"Here he comes, pardner," whispered a voice in Magee's ear. "Have a good look at him, before he gets cleaned up."

Magee whirled to face the speaker, and saw Higgins, fully dressed again in regulation uniform and cap, standing guard at the other vestibule. On the brakeman's face was a grin like that of a Cheshire cat's.

"His train was wrecked," murmured Higgins, chuckling, as the spotter staggered up the steps and limped to a seat inside the coach. "I hope you like the job."

"Head-end or rear-end collision?" asked Magee with a wink.

"Both!" Higgins grinned. "Also, I think somebody sidewiped him a couple of times before he got in the clear."

Magee chuckled and flashed the waiting engineer the signal to proceed. Once inside and the traps closed, Magee turned to his grinning brakeman. "How did you manage it, Jerry? You certainly done a good job."

"Me do a good job?" Higgins said, a look of longing on his weather-beaten face. "Pardner, I takes a oath I never so much as got to lay the weight of a finger on that gent."

"Jerry!"

"Fact, pardner. The bouncer at Charlie's takes my job away from me, before I can get started. But every time the bouncer cracks down on Mr. Pointed Shoes, I cracks down one on the bouncer for luck. Once I misses the bouncer and almost killed a gent with a red nose that was looking on."

Magee looked at his brakeman curiously. "What started it?"

"He did," replied Higgins, grinning. "Tried to hog too much room at the bar, and then tried to tell Charlie that he'd paid for his drink, when he hadn't. Funny thing about that, too. After it was all over, I finds some money under my glass what I didn't know was there. Maybe he thought he had paid for his beer."

"And yet you say you never laid the weight of your finger on him?"

"Nary finger, pardner. But you'd 'a' died a-laughin' if you could have saw me kick him clean through Charlie's plate-glass window in front."

"Well, that makes me feel a little better!" Magee grinned. "Come on. Help me shake up the boys, before they go to sleep on us. Then we'll talk it over some more."

It took only a few minutes to collect the tickets in the smoker. All had the return portions of their round-trip tickets and handed them up without waiting to be asked. Only one passenger, somewhat the worse for an overdose of Dutch Charlie's hooch, presumed to argue that the conductor had already got his ticket. Higgins found it in the man's hatband, however, and lifted it.

The chair car was even easier, where collections were concerned. In the last chair seat sat the spotter, dabbling with a handkerchief at his many bruises and abrasions. Magee suppressed a grin and held out his hand.

"Ticket, please."

"Give me a pass slip, and I'll fill it out," said the bruised one peevishly.

As if in a daze, Magee handed over a pass slip. He wondered what new trick

the man was about to spring on him. Why would the man use his pass when he still had the return portion of the ticket he had used to go down to Coaltown on? As the fellow handed the slip back, properly filled out, Magee examined it closely, his eyes gleaming with suspicion.

"Where's your pass?" demanded Magee. "Let me see it."

"Getting mighty particular all of a sudden, aren't you?" snarled the fellow, as he yanked out his cardcase with a savage jerk and flashed it before Magee's eyes. Another snarl, and the cardcase was replaced. "I hope you are satisfied —now."

"Well, I'm not!" Magee snapped. "I said I wanted to see that pass, Mr. Barberry. And I meant just that. Hand it over!"

For a moment, it looked as if Barberry was going to rebel. Magee hoped he would. Perhaps the gleam in the conductor's gray eyes warned Barberry that now was no time for mulishness. With a half sneer, he mockingly handed over the pass to the conductor.

"I'll remember this," Barberry said, the hint of a threat in his tones. "Better take a good look, while you are at it. It is possible you won't get a chance to see many more like it."

Magee did take a good look at it. When he had finished examining the front of the pass, he turned it over on its back for another look. Suddenly Magee tore the pass slip into fragments and scattered them on the floor. The pass itself, Magee dropped into his own pocket.

"The fare to Pineville is one dollar and thirty cents," he told Barberry. "Sorry to trouble you, but please hurry, as I have much work up ahead to do."

"I'll do nothing of the sort!" rasped Barberry, jumping to his feet in a towering rage. "You have all the transportation that you're going to get from me. Give me back my pass."

Magee ignored this command. Instead, his hand strayed to the signal cord. "I'm not here to argue with passengers," he said in his most polite manner. "I'm here to look after their interests and protect the company's. Either you pay fare or you get off. Which is it to be?"

"And you're going to keep my pass?" Barberry blustered.

"If it's yours," Magee replied. "But we'll let the company decide that. Right now, I want one dollar and thirty cents from you. Do I get it?"

Barberry was livid with rage. Already the train was slowing down for the little station of Mendon. Magee gave a questioning nod in the direction of the door, his eyes fixed on Barberry's pointed shoes.

"Well?"

"I'm broke!" Barberry managed to gasp. "I was robbed of my pocketbook and ticket at Coaltown to-night. I'll have to throw myself on your mercy and ask you to carry me to Pineville."

"Nothing doing!" said Magee shortly. "I wouldn't carry me grandmother's picture, unless it had a ticket. You'll have to get off."

"But you've carried me this far without any payment, you might as well take me on in! I'll pay you to-morrow, if you will."

Magee shook his head. Higgins thrust his head in at the front door of the car, and the conductor beckoned him back. The brakeman lost no time in complying.

"Have a heart, man!" begged Barberry. "Don't put me off here. You know as well as I do what class of people they are. I'd be killed before morning."

"Sorry," Magee murmured. "Gotta abide by the rules."

Suddenly Barberry straightened as if struck by a happy thought. The next thing Magee knew, he was holding a watch and chain in his hand.

"Take this for security," begged Barberry. "I'll redeem it to-morrow."

Higgins' face lengthened.

Magee shook his head, however. "Ain't got no license to run a loan office, man. Couldn't do it. Are you going to get off peaceable, or must I put you off?"

"Neither!" barked Barberry. "I dare you to put me off! I'll hang your hide to a tree as surely as you do make such an attempt. I'll see that you are made to pay for this. First, you take my pass. Now, you refuse to accept security for a ride and threaten me."

"Exactly," Magee agreed. "My brakeman will assist you to alight." He turned

to Higgins. "Jerry, will you kindly aid this gent in unloading?"

"With pleasure unknown!" Higgins chuckled. "Come along, sport."

"You bum!" snarled Barberry, as Higgins' steel fingers clamped on the padded shoulders of his coat. "Keep your dirty paws off me."

What happened after that, Magee had but a hazy vision. He recalled that Higgins hustled Barberry to the open vestibule, and that the train started almost immediately thereafter. Barberry, however, was not with them.

CHAPTER V.

THE STUNT HE PULLED.

THE meeting was called for eleven o'clock. Barberry was there, so was Nathan Goodwill, sloping chin and all, when Magee and Higgins entered and found seats near Pratt's desk. Magee was sure he saw a twinkle in Pratt's eyes as he glanced their way. There was no twinkle in Barberry's eyes, however. They gleamed vengefully at his two assailants of the night before.

Nathan Goodwill lost no time in showing that he was out for gore. "Of course, I know time means nothing to you fellows," he said in cutting tones to Magee and Higgins, "but as I recall it, this meeting was scheduled for eleven o'clock and not eleven-seven, as the clock shows." His well-manicured hand, slim and brown, gestured at the clock on the wall.

Magee's eyes followed the wave of that hand, then calmly drew out his own watch and held it up for Goodwill to see. "My watch is standard and says it's ten fifty-seven right now," Magee remarked. "That clock there ain't standard, so I don't pay no attention to it."

"I should hope not!" said Pratt. "That clock hasn't been running for a week now. Nathan, that's one on you!"

Higgins laughed and helped himself to a fresh chew of tobacco. Goodwill, with a blank look on his sallow face, took one look at the clock and sank into his seat.

Pratt drummed on the table for attention. "Magee, do you and Mr. Higgins wish a representative from your lodges to be present at this investigation?"

"No." Magee smiled. "I'm satisfied that you'll see that we get a square deal."

"Then we will proceed with the first complaint on hand. Mike, Mr. Barberry says you took up his pass and kept it, refusing to honor it. Is that correct?"

"Yes, sir."

"Outrageous!" Goodwill barked. "Soon, I suppose, an official cannot ride on a train unless he happens to be personally acquainted with its conductor."

Pratt waited until Goodwill had subsided before he spoke again. When he did he addressed his remarks to Magee. "Why did you do that, Magee?"

"Because it was not signed on the back, where the owner's signature is supposed to be," Magee replied, laying the pass on the desk before the superintendent. "And according to the rules and regu——"

Pratt's gesture stopped him in the middle of the sentence. He looked at the pass, and then handed it over to Goodwill.

"If you expect my men to live strictly up to the rules, Nathan, you can't blame them when they catch your own men short," said the superintendent.

Nathan Goodwill glanced at the pass and then at Barberry. His eyes as well as that sloping chin hinted at a future settlement in private. Higgins coughed.

"Which ends that little matter," Pratt said with a smile.

"But not the ejectment of a passenger," said Goodwill. "He put a man off in a place where he could not get lodging or food."

"He could if he had money," put in Higgins just then. "Ain't our fault if Blueberry was busted flat."

"And I walked all night on the railroad ties to get here!" came wrathfully from Barberry. "A truck picked me up at Dwight this morning."

Magee grinned, as his eyes took in Barberry's pointed shoes. The conductor could imagine the torture that a long walk in those shoes would produce. Well, Barberry deserved it.

"Higgins is right," Pratt said quietly. "Magee has filed an ejectment report of which I approve his course."

"Maybe you approve of his carrying passengers without paying fare?" sneered Barberry.

"Yes," added Goodwill. "Perhaps Mr. Magee can explain away that little detail, since he is so good at explaining other things."

Magee and Higgins exchanged hasty glances.

Pratt looked up with a troubled face. "If Mike Magee carried a passenger free," said the superintendent, "I would feel that it was my duty to approve of his course in so doing, because I would feel sure that he was justified in so doing. You see, I know Mike and believe in him. But I don't believe he carried a passenger free. Did you, Mike?"

"No, sir." Magee replied, shooting the super a grateful glance.

Higgins coughed violently. Barberry jumped to his feet.

"How about me?" he demanded, pointing a finger at Magee. "I suppose you will deny that you carried me from Coaltown to Mendon—yet you know that I paid you no fare."

The ring of hate in his voice was not lost on the men gathered in the room. It was Nathan Goodwill, however, who electrified the assembly with his sudden change of face. As if by a miracle, it seemed that a chin appeared in the place where a chin is supposed to be. His brown eyes blazed, and his thin lips tightened in a straight line, as he whirled to face Barberry.

"Does that statement refer to yourself, Barberry?" he snapped, each word coming like a bullet from those set lips of his. "Does it?"

Barberry squirmed uneasily in his seat. It was plain that he was nonplused at the change in his chief. He licked his lips and winced as Goodwill's index finger placed itself on a level with his eyes.

"Does it?"

"Yes, sir. It's the truth, sir. I don't see that it makes any difference. I was a passenger——"

Goodwill cut him short with a gesture that held in it nothing but contempt. "We'll kill that charge, Carl," said Goodwill, whirling back to face Pratt. "I admit that I am picayunish and a stickler for rules, but I don't draw any false lines. And I assure you that Mr. Barberry will not bother any of your men in the future. Mr. Barberry is going to take a long rest, away from the railroad game, especially our railroad game." He turned to Barberry. "That's all for you," he said curtly. "We'll excuse you from this meeting. I'll finish with you later."

Barberry lost no time in getting out of the room. When he had gone, Goodwill mopped a perspiring brow and made his way over to where Magee sat. With a queer little smile he held out his hand.

"Magee, I owe you apologies for this unpleasantness. Will you accept them and believe that they are from the bottom of my heart?"

Magee's only answer was to hold out his hand to meet the one offered him.

"I admit I play a queer game," went on Goodwill, as if speaking to himself. "But I don't stack the cards or cheat while playing. Nor do I keep in my department any one suspected or caught doing it."

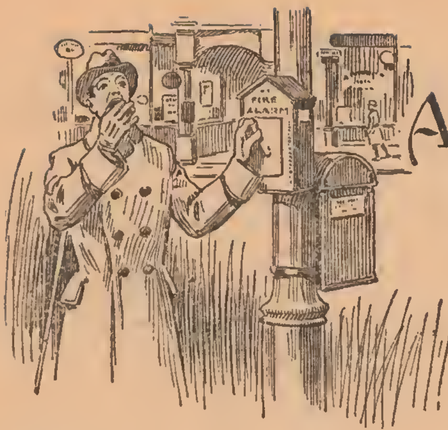
"Which is to your credit this time," Pratt said with a smile, extending to Goodwill a duplicate copy of the ticket report rendered by Magee for the trip the night in question. "On it, you will notice that Magee did cut a cash-fare slip for one fare from Coaltown to Mendon. I've been holding that trump back, until I saw what lead you were going to make."

"Well, I'll be switched!" ejaculated Goodwill. He turned to Magee again. "Do you mean to tell me——"

"It was Jerry's idea," the conductor interrupted hastily. "He said that the guy was crooked enough to pull just such a stunt. And since the fare didn't amount to much, I just paid it to make sure he wouldn't have no come-back."

"That beats me!" Goodwill declared. "You win. I hope you never get off the Marland plug."

"But I am," said Magee with a grin. "Barney Carroll will be back in a few days, and I'm going back to my freight run again. For seven years I wanted to be a passenger conductor, because I thought it was the best job in the world. Now, I know it isn't. It's like what a fellow once said about wanting things. When you at last get what you think you want, you find it ain't what you want at all."



A Lodging for the Knight

By Thomas Thursday

WHEN that light comedian of musical-comedy revues, Jim Tarbox, reached the door of his furnished room in the "Roaring Forties"—so called because the landladies and lords roar when rent is due—he tried to turn the knob. Some knobs do not always turn. The one on Jim Tarbox's door was of that type just then. Then he struck a match, and the light gleamed on a note directly above the knob. It read:

> Don't try and bust door open. Rent passed doo 2 weeks, 2 weeks more than we genrally trust anybody. Your cheep wardrope will be helled till payment is paid. Meentime, take the air with best wishes.
> (Signed) MURPHY & GOLDBUG, Props.

"Huh," grunted Tarbox, "so I ain't good for three weeks, hey? I'm to be treated like a regular tramp!" He leaned against the paper-shedding wall and meditated. "Well," he mused at length, "I guess I am a bum, at that! A guy with only two bits in his poke and two weeks' back rent staring him in the kisser ain't exactly the lion's bath robe when it comes to great wealth." After that, Tarbox descended the two flights of stairs and, following the admonition of Messrs. Murphy & Goldbug, took the air.

The light comedian was irritatingly broke, busted, and altogether strapped. His engagement with the "Zigzag Revue and Follies," which was dated to run twenty weeks, tottered less than twenty days. That's always the way with the good shows—ask any performer—while the punk ones run indefinitely.

Tarbox walked to the corner and watched the newest Broadway electric sign, proclaiming the wonders of "Doctor Sniffsnapper's Oil of Onions—A Positive Cure for Bunions, Baldness, and Hives," flutter for a time and vanish. It was the fifteenth of February, a day that may not be so cold in either Miami or an oven, but Tarbox chanced to be in neither. He was in the land of New York City, and if the fifteenth of February isn't cold in that country, the natives feel that nature is holding out on them. It was cold. If you doubt it, just stand beside Mr. Tarbox, draped in a spring overcoat, and see for yourself.

The crisp breeze brought him to his full senses, and you have no idea how an actor can think when he's cold and hungry. He must have a bite to eat and a lodging for the night.

Walking toward him snappily, a block away to the south, was an officer, known to the comic sections as a cop. As he swung his nightstick to keep warm, he hummed a tune. Officer Pat Shapiro, being an excellent cop, was ever on the lookout for trouble. However, if he could spot it before it spotted him, he believed that a live bird was much better than a sermon over a dead one.

Tarbox saw the oncoming officer and forthwith brewed a bright, a very bright idea. That is, if it worked.

"I gotta eat," he soliloquized, "and I gotta sleep, but so long as a guy is honest he can stand right here and freeze his beak off without being disturbed. How the so ever, if I bust a window in

a jeweler's, or bounce a brick off some bird's bean, I am guaranteed a place to sleep and some cake. Not only that, but the cop will hail a green taxi with a bell on it and give me a free ride to the cooler. So I guess I'll play the part of a intoxicated gent, and then this here copper will lock me up for busting the Eighteenth Amendment to the Can'tstitution of the United America. Let's go!"

Tarbox ruffled his hair, tilted his hat to an angle that suggested lunacy, then staggered around in a circle.

Officer Pat Shapiro came closer. Unfortunately, however, his eagle eye was not upon the merry-go-round comedian. To make matters worse, there could be heard the shrill whistle of a brother officer in distress, just as Shapiro might have seen Tarbox. The officer dashed across the street, unaware of the remarkable performance that had been staged for his sole benefit.

Tarbox stopped his impersonation, not without disgust. His act, in the parlance of the profession, had taken a terrible flop. "Was luck apple sauce," he mused, "I'd have to nibble bean soup forever. And I hope the bird who blew that whistle swallowed it!"

II.

DISAPPOINTED, but not discouraged, Tarbox set his brain to working on a new scheme to get a lodging and a bite to eat. He gazed up and down Broadway and noted that pedestrians were few and far between, like trolley cars—or anything—when you're in a hurry. Directly across the street was an all-night, pancake-and-syrup beanery, where a white-garbed gent was tossing flapjacks in the air like dumb-bells.

The sight made Tarbox smack his lips, jam his hands into his pockets, and finger his lone quarter. Should he or should he not get some flapjacks and syrup? He should not! For he was that type of actor who will not part with their last cent, even though they have missed a whole row of meals. Tarbox had never been absolutely penniless, and he refused to be so now.

He peered up the street for the second time and noticed a portly gentleman coming his way, carrying a cane. Promptly the active brain of the light comedian originated another bright idea. That is, if it worked.

"Here's a chance of a lifetime!" he enthused. "I'll just grab the old boy's cane; he'll howl for help in six lingos, including the Scandinavian, and I'll get pinched. It looks soft, and how I can fail is beyond me. Let's go!"

The victim approached, head high, his whiskers flowing in the breeze. Tarbox also approached, head low, his fedora flapping in the wind.

"Hey, gimme that cane!" growled the comedian, jerking the Malacca stick from the stranger. "Gimme that cane or I'll bounce——"

The old fellow relinquished the cane without the slightest struggle. "Oh, I beg your pardon, sir!" he exclaimed. "Really, I didn't intend to steal your cane—just picked it up on the next corner. You must have dropped it! Glad to have been able to return it to right owner—er—good night, sir!"

Woof!

"Was luck macaroni," mused the disgusted Tarbox, as he fingered the cane, "I'd have to eat mince pie forever! What's more, either that guy or me is plumb nutty! What and the blue sky do I want with a cane, hey? I wouldst like a place to sleep and a few crumbs of cake, and a cane ain't no good for neither. This is certainly a cock-eyed world!"

He walked back to the brass railing in front of the Divided Cigar Store and dangled his new—and useless—acquisition. Once more he looked up and down Broadway for possible victims. It was getting colder and nearly two o'clock at night. A place to sleep was now imperative.

Suddenly, Tarbox observed a young lady tripping toward him from the uptown direction. Immediately, the active mind of the shivering comedian—you have no idea how you can think when you're cold and hungry—decided to play a dangerous game, a game that has wrecked many a gay Lothario and misguided Romeo.

Tarbox decided that he would flirt with the young lady. If he had the same

success that attended his previous attempts at the flirting art, he would be in jail in less than no time, if not sooner. He reasoned that she would let out a screech in at least eight octaves, and then he would be in Dutch—also, he would be in jail.

"Oh, boy!" he chortled. "This is soft! I'll just walk up to this pretty maiden, and say, 'Ah, there, "Little One," whither thou goest, what?' Then she'll let forth a ballyhoo and tap me for a row of sandpapered eels. Let's go!"

He swung his cane grandiloquently—which you'll find in a dictionary, not that it means anything—and awaited the arrival of the girl. As she neared him, he saw that she appeared somewhat dejected and out of spirits. She was blond, dressed rather bizarre, and just the sort, he figured, to give a terrible battle to any one who crossed her path.

"Ah, there, Little One!" began Tarbox, "whither thou goest, what?" Then he waited for results.

"Well, you can search me!" quoth Little One, stopping abruptly. "But I know one thing, old dear, and that is if I ever go out with another one of them bloomers called 'Revues,' I hope I get stranded at the North Pole! This is the third time that I 'most hadda walk back to N'Yawk."

Woof!

Tarbox was foiled again. However, an actor soon gets over disappointments. He recognized that he was face to face with a fellow artiste, or performer; one, like himself, in distress.

"Sorry, sister," he said; "I'm in the same boat. Here—take this two bits from yours truly, Jim Tarbox. It's all I got. You're a woman, and I'm a man, and it's always harder for a woman, sister. I guess I can get by."

"Thanks, brother," said the girl with a tired but thankful smile. "I won't forget you. Annie Tenny don't forget favors."

"That's all right, Annie," remarked Jim Tarbox. "Beat it over there to that white-fronted beanery. They tell me that their flapjacks ain't the worst in the city. Good luck!"

"Thanks—er—Jim. I'm awful hungry. Goo'-by!"

III.

OUTWITTED in his third attempt to get a lodging for the night, the comedian went back to the brass rail and was at once enveloped in assorted gloom. "Was luck a castle," he soliloquized, "I'd have to live in a barn forever!"

It was now half past two—in the morning. Passers-by were fewer than ever. The thermometer had taken a drop as if some imp had smashed the glass, allowing the quicksilver to spurt downward. Tarbox shivered, snuggled more deeply into his spring overcoat—he had only a ticket for his winter one—and thought harder than ever.

"Believe me," he muttered grimly, "I'm gonna get into jail, if I have to blow up the whole city!"

Immediately after that bit of flamboyant vehemency, he observed, for the first time, the fire-alarm box directly in front of him. One glance, and he was seized by a weird idea.

"I bet I get a bunk to sleep in and some eats now!" he snapped. "If I ain't mistaken, anybody who turns in a alarm when they ain't no fire gets all the lodging and cakes he wants and for some time to come. How the so ever, since I ain't noticed any offers from Frohman and Belasco cluttering up the mail box, I figger that I might as well be a guest of the city as a guest of the gutter. Let's go!"

He sprinted toward the red box, gave the handle a twist and a few more twists for good measure. "Atta boy!" gloated Tarbox, as he heard the bell tingle. "If that don't land me in the cooler, then I'll go down and paste the chief of police on the beezer!" He posed beside the box, prepared to give himself up to the first officer who came along.

Then he received another jar.

His gaze wandered toward an old-fashioned building, across the street. It was one of those brown-brick affairs that saluted John Quincy Adams when he strolled down Broadway, that is, if he did stroll. Tarbox gasped as he saw smoke and flames issuing from the top floor. That building was afire or he was crazy.

Soon fire engines came from the right, from the left, and the middle. Although

the fire service of the city was rated to be the equal of any similar system in the world, Tarbox was far from willing to pay it any such compliments.

He stood boredly beside the box and hazily watched the firemen put out the blaze, which proved to be a small one. No one, it pained him to note, had accused him of ringing the alarm.

The last engine had clattered and banged away, leaving him alone. His thoughts suddenly turned to Messrs. Murphy & Goldbug, proprietors of the rooming house that had so snappily evicted him. He felt that he would just then enjoy knocking either one of those gents for a goal, as he would express it.

IV.

PRESENTLY, Tarbox heard loud talking across the street. He gazed over and observed a girl and a man, standing directly outside of the white-fronted restaurant, engaged in what seemed to be an altercation of words, many words.

"Help!" the girl cried.

"Aha," thought the comedian, with the blood of ancient knights tingling in his veins, "guess I'll hop over and see if I can promote a little trouble for myself! Looks like a damsel in what they call distress. Might be a neat battle between man and wife, and if I butt in, they'll both land on my bean, then have me pinched for interrupting a friendly fight. Let's go!"

Halfway over, he was surprised to see that the girl was Annie Tenny, the girl to whom he had given his last quarter a short while earlier. Then he hastened his pace to get a look at the man. The bird had a face that seemed familiar.

It was Murphy, of Messrs. Murphy & Goldbug. Forthwith, Tarbox became immediately active.

"Hey, what's the idea?" opened up the comedian.

"This man insulted me!" said Annie Tenny.

Murphy recognized Tarbox at once. "Well, well—so it's you, is it?" asked Murphy.

"Yeah—it's me!" snapped back the comedian. "Who did you think it was—Hamlet?"

"You poor ham, for two cents——"

Tarbox did not wait to learn what Murphy would do for two cents or even a dollar ninety-eight cents. He closed his right fist, took aim at the sneering face of his ex-landlord, then let it go. It went! In fact, it would have gone a great distance farther had not the large countenance of Murphy stopped it.

The blow, however, did not cause Murphy to hit the pavement with the thud that Tarbox had expected. Instead, the husky just blinked his eyes a few times, regained his senses, then lunged at his aggressor with both hands flying. His terrific right swing missed Tarbox's chin by at least a yard; his left wallop, aimed at the nose, missed by six inches, and landed plumb against the iron lamp-post. The lamp-post did not suffer, but Murphy's hand did.

Then Officer Pat Shapiro arrived to settle the argument. Annie Tenny tried to explain, Tarbox tried to explain, ditto Murphy, all at one and the same time. However, Officer Shapiro was no Solomon, not even a Landis. So he thought it best to assist the trio to the station house and let them do their explaining therein.

Ten minutes later, Messrs. Murphy and Tarbox, locked up for the night, continued their joyous debate from cells opposite each other. After which, Tarbox fell into a happy sleep. He had accomplished his object, to get a bunk for the night, and the fact that Mr. Murphy was the cause of it gave him deep joy. What could be sweeter? Nothing, but this:

Six months later the Majestic, the Home of the World's Best Vaudeville, announced in electric lights a foot high the headline act for the week—Tarbox and Tenny, in a great comedy entitled "A Lodging for the Knight." According to the program, the act was written from life by Jim Tarbox, and his wife, Annie Tenny.

If you get a chance, drop in and see 'em.

They're good!



Have One On Me!

By Jack Bechdolt

CHAPTER I.

READY TO GO.

FOR a moment Colonel Harrison B. Grove regarded Larry Doyle's proffered cigar mildly. "I do not smoke," said the older man, "but——" There was about the colonel a radiation of benignancy which lent interest to anything he said, even to so trivial a remark as this. The radiation seemed to center about his beard, which was parted fanwise down the center of his chin and flowed out gracefully, framing a large and mild countenance.

The effect was much heightened when his hat was removed, for Colonel Grove was gracefully bald, and his highly polished dome with its fringe of fluffy, long, gray hair had the clean-swept appearance of something holy. Just now the colonel wore his old-fashioned, square-crowned, black felt hat, for he stood with Mr. Doyle in the street.

On this occasion, the colonel was dressed in his black, loose-cut, old-fashioned coat and pepper-and-salt trousers and wide-toed, soft-leather shoes and immaculate, stiff, white linen and carried the gold-headed cane which was a tradition in that West Side block. Taken altogether, Harrison B. Grove was a symbol as he held Larry Doyle's gift cigar between his white fingers and regarded it with a gentle smile.

"No; I do not smoke," Colonel Grove remarked with just the proper shade of apologetic regret, "but—I have many younger friends who enjoy a good cigar. Thank you, Mr. Doyle."

"That's all right, colonel," Larry Doyle said breezily. He was a breezy-appearing young man, thin, tall, red-haired, with a twinkle in his blue eye and a square chin that spelled determination. "You might mention to your friends that I'm going to operate this place as an up-to-date cigar, confectionery, and notion store under the motto 'We Live to Serve' just as soon as alterations can be completed. You might suggest that your friends drop around and see what a modern, snappy, hustling cigar stand like they have out in Detroit and Kansas City looks like. I guess that'll be quite some treat to some of these West Side New Yorkers!"

Harrison B. Grove's interest brightened. "You have decided to buy it?"

"It's a deal!" Doyle declared. "Your price of five thousand seems a bit steep, but——"

"A thousand cash will bind the bargain, Mr. Doyle. The balance I think I can arrange to spread over a year. Let the business pay for itself, that is both sound economics and, I trust, a proper, neighborly spirit."

"It's pretty decent of you, colonel!"

Colonel Grove dismissed the tribute with a smile. "It is sometimes my pleasure—and privilege—to help the boys along," he remarked.

"Now about the rent——" Doyle began.

Colonel Grove spoke up quickly, with mild, open candor. "The building, you understand, is not mine. The—ah—Star

Realty Company controls it, I believe. I am merely selling stock, fixtures, and good will. As I explained before, I happen to own these through trying to help out the last tenant with a loan which he, unfortunately, was not able to repay——"

"Oh, him!" Larry Doyle was openly scornful. "He was bound to make a failure of any business."

"You knew Mr. Culmbacher, perhaps?"

"No; saw him once. Bought a cigar from him, just as an experiment. You see, colonel, it's this way!" Doyle became confidential in his mounting enthusiasm. "I've worked in the cigar business out West, in Detroit and Kansas City and live towns like that. Always had an ambition to run a place of my own along service-first lines. The modern merchandising idea, you know—sell goods with a smile—give 'em just a little more than their money buys—build up good will through square dealing and good stock and a clean, snappy store and courteous treatment—all that sort of thing.

"Had this bug ever since I held my first job," he went on. "I've been saving up a stake to get it started. I was fixed this year, so I was ready to go. Came here to New York—might as well tackle the biggest place of all right off the bat, I decided—and I began to look around. I was looking for the worst-run cigar business in town—and I found it!"

"You mean this store, Mr. Doyle?"

"Absolutely! Nothing personal against this Culmbacher, you understand. Just didn't savvy, that's all. Old-time methods. A dusty, neglected little cave. Ratty, dried-up stock. Place smelled to heaven of stale tobacco. Nobody in sight when I come in. I rap on the counter. Wait five minutes. 'Old Sour Face' drags himself out of that little hole in back and glares at me.

"Right then, colonel, I knew I'd found the store I was looking for to start my business in. Good location, every break of luck in favor of growth, and a grouch like that driving away trade. Of course I didn't know the place was going to be put on the market, but this morning—talk about luck!—I saw your ad in the paper and that's why I'm here. I want to run this store right!"

Harrison B. Grove, stroking his neatly parted whiskers, nodded benignantly. "Yes. Yes, indeed. I see your point, Mr. Doyle. A wonderful opportunity to apply the golden rule in business. Wonderful!"

Larry Doyle laughed modestly. "I thought I'd try it out. How much did you say the rent is?"

"I understand it is fifty dollars a month, Mr. Doyle."

"Fair enough. A lease?"

"No. No, Mr. Doyle; the—ah—Star Company does not write leases on its property, I am told. Of course you might take that up with the company——"

"I sure will," Doyle promised. "Got to have a lease. That's the modern way to do business."

"Ah, yes, yes." Colonel Grove sighed. "It takes you young fellows to teach us, Mr. Doyle."

Larry Doyle blushed. "Oh, I don't know about that," he disclaimed. "Have a cigar, colonel?" he asked enthusiastically.

"I do not smoke," Colonel Grove's hand was extended for a second gift, "but—ah—I have numerous friends who enjoy a good smoke. Thank you, Mr. Doyle."

CHAPTER II.

"YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN?"

HAVE a cigar?" Larry Doyle asked Al Pincus, of Al Pincus' Tonsorial Parlors: Shave, Haircut, Shampoo, Manicuring, and Shine.

"Thanks," Al Pincus said noncommittally and sniffed the proffered gift. He vouchsafed a smile. "Smells good."

"It is good. Light up!"

Larry Doyle's smile penetrated to the corner where sat Miss Flo Murphy, the manicure. It was a happy, flashing smile, and Flo Murphy found her own lips answering it.

The red-haired young man inspected his finger nails critically. "I guess you'd better give me a treatment," he suggested to Miss Murphy.

Perhaps it was Harrison B. Grove's somewhat lengthy gray locks which suggested dropping into Pincus' before he

went to interview the Star Realty Company about a lease on the cigar store. Anyway, Doyle decided, it was a good opportunity to become acquainted, and he seized the opportunity by telling Mr. Pincus and Miss Murphy about his plans.

"You buy from Harrison B. Grove?" Pincus wanted to know. "There's a big man, I tell you!" The barber said it reverently.

"Fine man," Doyle agreed.

"A big man!" Pincus insisted. "Not many like him nowadays. A big man, you know what I mean?"

Doyle agreed. Flo Murphy, scraping and polishing Doyle's big fingers clasped dexterously in her small, warm hands, said nothing, just scraped and polished.

"Biggest man in the ward," Pincus declared, improving on his former remarks.

"See his house?" Pincus asked presently, snipping on Doyle's hair.

"Yeah. Went there to settle our business. Big brownstone——"

"Finest house in the ward—finest on the West Side. All fixed swell inside. Old-time furniture and lace curtains and rugs. And statues, too. And oil paintings, genuine old-time ones."

"Great old house," Doyle agreed.

"Swellest house on the West Side—owns it all himself."

"He owns a lot of property—they say," Flo Murphy contributed noncommittally.

Pincus snipped with critical attention to the carrot locks. "A good man," he said, after a pause. "You know what I mean? Good man. Does a lot of good I'm——"

"He certainly gave me a fair break."

"Yeah; does a lot of good. You know, stops to talk to everybody, asks about their kids and their folks and everything. Gives the kids pennies. That fountain down on the corner, he put that up; you see his name on it? Gives to all these charity drives, too. Always see his name in the lists. Goes to church, too, every Sunday, you know what I mean? Silk hat and everything. Does you good just to see him. Like going yourself."

"He certainly is in right around here," Flo Murphy said with something like a sigh. Her sigh appeared to irritate Al Pincus.

"A good man," the barber repeated. "'Harrison B. Grove, the pride of the ward.' That's what they call him. The governor of this State called him that, right in public!"

"I guess if he was to run for office, he'd get it all right," Flo conceded.

"You bet he could!" the barber declared, brushing Doyle's hair with vigor. "Get anything he went after—alderman—or mayor even!"

"So you're going to start a store?" Flo fixed her pretty gray eyes on her customer appraisingly.

"I'll say I am! A modern, up-to-date cigar store, a place where you get service with a smile!" Larry Doyle was started on the topic nearest his heart. His blue eyes sparkled as he talked on, coloring his dream in iridescent hues. With a listener like Flo Murphy so near at hand, a pretty girl who seemed to speak all sorts of applause and encouragement by the simple means of silent attention and her smile, Doyle outdid all former presentation of his ambitions.

"Sounds fine," Flo said at last. "Glad you're going to be with us, Mr. Doyle."

"So'm I, now that I know you're my neighbor." Then Doyle blushed.

Flo Murphy, whose ideas on the matter of masculine freshness were strict, saw the blush and forgave all. "I'll hang a horseshoe over your door!" she volunteered and felt herself growing pink.

When Doyle was gone, Flo observed: "It's a darn shame!"

"What's a darn shame?" Al Pincus asked, bridling.

"Selling him that cigar business."

"What's the matter with that cigar business?"

"It's a hoodoo corner, and you know it. Four men tried it and failed. I guess you know that!"

"Well, that ain't Harrison B. Grove's fault, is it?"

"I never said it was his fault——"

"Well, it ain't. Harrison B. Grove never done anything crooked in his life!"

"I never said he did anything crooked, but I'm darn sick of hearing about Harrison B. Grove and how good he is! Sick of it! And, anyway, it's a hoodoo corner, and you know it!"

"I guess that wouldn't bother your friend any," Pincus declared. "To hear

him talk, there never was anybody in N'York knew how to sell cigars till he came along. I guess he'll show us some things——"

"Well, it's a shame. It's a hoodoo store, and he spent all his money on it—and he's a nice kid. And it's a shame!"

Pincus puffed on his cigar and sniffed the delicious aroma of the smoke. "I'll say one thing for him: he does know a good cigar."

CHAPTER III.

THE DODGING EARLY BIRD.

A FEW days later, Larry Doyle was busy, opening cartons. Though the fall morning still held a sting of frost, Doyle's coat was off. He was whistling as he worked.

Flo Murphy, on her way to Al Pincus' shop, gave him a smile. "You're one little hustler!" she said.

"You gotta hustle these days." Doyle proved it by stopping work. His answering smile held an invitation to chat a moment. "Grand opening comes off Saturday," he announced with a proud wave at the hoodoo corner, now glistening in new paint. "And say! I'm not forgetting the ladies, either! Putting in a line of high-class candy and little toilet gimcracks, such as talcum and rouge packets and hair nets. Oh, I guess we'll show this block something!"

Flo nodded. "I think that's a great idea! And how about the lease—get that yet?"

"We-e-ll, no. But the company promised to take the matter up——"

"Hope you get it. Rents are something fierce. If you got a good rent, freeze onto it, somehow."

There was something so genuinely friendly in her warning that Larry Doyle was emboldened. "Wait!" he requested. "Hold on a minute! Step into the shop—and look out for that wet paint!" He dived behind his counter as Flo came in and emerged presently, somewhat red of face, holding forth a decorated box of candy. "For you," said Doyle, a little out of breath. "To square up the horseshoe you nailed over my door."

"Oh, but I didn't nail it—yet."

"It's there just the same. It was nailed up the minute you wished it onto me. I can see it, can't you?" Doyle looked above his door earnestly.

Flo's eyes followed his glance, then she laughed. "It's there," she declared, "and my best wishes with it. And thanks, awfully. I love candy——"

Doyle said hurriedly: "If I don't seem too fresh—or anything—and you'd let me know where you live, I'd like to call around some night with another box."

This, Flo considered gravely. "I think that would be fine," she agreed and gave the desired information.

Presently Harrison B. Grove, making his morning promenade of the block as he did rain or shine, paused at the store. "Ah! The early bird!"

"The early bird," said Doyle, grinning, "dodges the hookworm, colonel."

Colonel Grove considered, parting his whiskers judicially. "Ah!" he conceded benignantly. "Good, Mr. Doyle. Very good! Everything going all right?"

"Going fine. We'll show 'em what hustling can do——"

"That's good· that's good! Hard work! Nothi[illegible] like it. You certainly have the right idea, young man!"

"Have a good cigar, colonel?"

Harrison B. Grove hesitated. "Well, I do not smoke, but——"

Flo Murphy, hurrying up the street to Al Pincus' barber shop, was muttering under her breath. "A shame. A doggone shame! A nice kid like him buying that hoodoo store!"

CHAPTER IV.

BEST HE COULD DO.

SIDE by side, Larry Doyle and Flo Murphy sat in a dreary little West Side park. They had been sitting thus, silent, absorbed, on a hard bench for an hour. The summer night was growing late, and the park had emptied of all but them.

Doyle raised his eyes from long contemplation of the toes of a scuffed shoe. He stared straight before him as he spoke, with a noticeable effort to keep his voice even and unemotional. "Listen, Flo——"

"Yes, Larry?"

"We've gotta call it off. I—you—me—— We can't go on with it, Flo!"

Flo also made a desperate effort to be calm, rational, reasonable. "You mean—Larry—you don't love me any more? Is that it, Larry?"

Larry Doyle shuddered. He barely controlled the inclination to take her into a crushing embrace that would nail that lie forever. The effort made his voice harsh. "Forget that stuff! There's never going to be any other girl for me, and you know it! But I can't ask you to wait any longer. It isn't right! We've been engaged a year, waiting and waiting and waiting! Well, we can't get married now any better than we could a year ago. So far as I can see we can't ever get married——"

"Larry! I thought things were going better with the store."

"The store"—Larry said it with his heartbreak plain in his voice—"the store is going to hell—and I can't stop it." He added bitterly: "The rent was raised again. Got notice to-day."

"Again! Oh, Larry!"

"Every time I get a nickel ahead, it's the same old story. I—— You'd think they had some way of finding out, this Star Realty Company. You'd think they knew how I stand, the way they've kept me grinding on, like a slave, trying to keep up with their rent graft! First, it was those notes to Grove kept me broke, kept us from getting married. Then I get them all paid off, and it looks like there was a break to save the money, and the rent goes up—and keeps on going up. Every time I get a new idea and work harder and build some new business they raise me again. Blast the crooks!" Doyle shook a fist at an inoffensive arc light and ground his teeth. "You'd think they were trying to force me into bankruptcy. Well, I won't quit!"

Flo's hands touched his arms and shoulders and quieted him. "Larry, dear." She pressed closer. "Let's not be foolish. Let's get married, anyway. You know I've saved a little out of my job—and Al Pincus says he'll always have the place for me as long as I want it. And you earn a living out of the store. Between us, we can make out. Let's——"

"I will not!" said Doyle decisively.

"We'd be happy, Larry. Just a little two-room flat with a kitchenette—awfully easy to keep house in one of 'em—you and I by ourselves——"

"I will not!" Doyle repeated. "I'll marry no wife who has to hold a job. My wife's going to have job enough looking after me—and our kids——"

Flo sighed. It was the unanswerable argument. When Larry Doyle's mind was set, it was set. "If only you could find another store," she suggested.

"Can't. Nowhere near here, anyway. And my trade's here. Haven't I tried? The Star Realty Company owns everything."

"They own all those tenements in our block, too," Flo contributed. "They're raising rents something awful. Nobody knows what to do about it!"

Doyle did not notice her remarks. His mind was on one track. "It's the end for us, Flo," he said drearily. "I won't ask you to wait—I won't promise to wait myself. It's off, you understand? I'll take that ring back——"

Flo flared into sudden vehemence. "You'll get your ring back when I give it you, Larry Doyle! Maybe it takes two to make a marriage, but I'll tell you this! You made me love you. You can't stop me waiting for you. I'm not that kind. We'll have no more talk about it. I love you, and that ends it!"

Suddenly his head was on her shoulder and he was begging for forgiveness. She agreed instantly, her mind still busy with the problem.

"Larry," said Flo, faintly hoping, "there's Harrison B. Grove——"

"Yes?"

"He could help you."

"Could he?" Doyle's lack of interest was noticeable.

"Well," Flo reasoned, brightening, "now that he's a candidate for alderman, I should think he'd be glad to do a favor for a man like you, that's got so many friends who can vote for him. Larry, why don't you go to Colonel Grove and tell him——"

"I did go to him—and told him my troubles," Doyle explained patiently. "The best he could do was offer to lend me money."

"Why, Larry! That's fine!"

"And take a mortgage on my stock," Doyle continued bitterly. "Then when

I couldn't pay him back—and I don't know how I ever could—he'd take over the business, like he did from old man Culmbacher. I told him, nothing doing."

Doyle dropped again into gloom. Eventually they walked home, shrouded in that same dull, hopeless cloud that made every day dismal.

As she bade him good night Flo said: "Maybe something will turn up. It's bound to!"

"It's got to!" Doyle groaned. "It's got to, or——"

He plodded off in the direction of his lonely, sparsely furnished hall room, his cloud of troubles dogging his heels, an inseparable companion.

A man whined out of the shadow of a building, a hand clawing at Doyle's arm. "Brother, I'm hungry. If you got a dime—or a quarter—or only a nickel I——"

Doyle shook off the hand, brushed aside the plea, and went on. Then he halted and went back. "Here, you!" he called. He caught the nondescript by the coat and took him under a street lamp for inspection.

"Well, what do you know!" Doyle exclaimed. "I thought there was something sort of familiar about that voice! Culmbacher!"

"Who are you?" The ragged figure backed off, wary, ready for flight.

"You used to run the cigar store in the Victoria flats," Doyle said. "I bought a cigar from you—it was rotten. So was the store. You failed, and I bought out the business. I run it now——"

"You run it now!" Culmbacher stared. His lip twisted upward in a silent grimace. Perhaps it was laughter, scornful laughter. "So you run it!" Culmbacher repeated.

Doyle was solicitous. "Look here, you look all in, old man. Let's get a bite and a cup of coffee and swap our troubles. This way!" Doyle locked arms with his predecessor and steered him toward a restaurant.

CHAPTER V.

FACTS THAT SPURRED.

THE story that Culmbacher told, after he had eaten with an appetite that appalled his host, did not promise much. After the cigar business failed, he had tried to get work in a store or cigar factory, had not done well, was out of a job, and homeless. He told it hurriedly, shamefacedly. "So you bought me out. That's good!" he concluded.

"Not so very good." Doyle smiled to cover the remark. "Have a cigar?"

Culmbacher bit off the end of the rolled leaf ravenously, lighted it, and puffed deep. He croaked abruptly: "How you making out?"

Doyle hesitated. "Fair. Only the landlord gets it all. I guess you know the Star Company—always raising rents every——"

"The Star Company—blah!" The derelict shot out the words with scathing contempt. He leaned across the table suddenly, grasped Doyle's sleeve, and rushed on, the words all in a jumble. "Look! Listen! You treated me white. First fellow treated me decent in months! I'll put you wise. Get out of that cigar business now. Now, if it isn't too late already——"

"What do you mean, too late?"

"Has Harrison B. Grove got a mortgage on your stock yet?"

"No; and he never will," Doyle declared, reddening angrily.

Culmbacher laughed, a hoarse, croaking, whispering cackle that was not joyous mirth. "He won't, eh? You think so! Look! Listen! The Star Realty Company—who do you think is the Star Company, eh? It's Harrison B. Grove. He's the company. He owns the building. He's the landlord. And look, another thing, you bought the business from Grove——"

"Yes!"

"I bought it from Grove!" Again he cackled. Culmbacher's look was fraught with meaning. "And the man who had it before me—Healy, that shot himself because he failed—he bought the business from Harrison B. Grove. Now, what do you think——"

"Exactly what are you getting at, Culmbacher?"

"Just exactly this, my friend! Harrison B. Grove is the biggest crook out of jail. He stung Healy; he stung me—now he stings you. See? He sells me the cigar store. I don't know he owns the building. As soon as I pay him the notes for the business, he begins raising

the rent till I can't stand it any longer. Then he loans me a little, just enough to get a mortgage against the stock and fixtures—just enough to force me into failure so he gets back the business in order to sell it all over again.

"Then he sells it to you," Culmbacher went on. "Of course you don't know he is also the landlord, the man behind the Star Realty Company. Well, do you see what he is doing now? Harrison B. Grove, the big, fine citizen that does good by all his neighbors—— Yes; he does!" Culmbacher's hoarse, mocking rasp of a laugh rose loud and sudden, bringing a startled waiter on the run.

"I see!" Larry Doyle said gently. "Now, I see! Harrison B. Grove, the public benefactor!" The blood had left his face, his mouth closed to a thin line, his blue eyes, frosty and narrowed, stared far away. With a pounce he demanded of Culmbacher: "How do you know all this?"

"I got a hint when I was kicked out. I investigated, put a lawyer on the job. I meant to take that crook into court. The lawyer said this was so—but hard to prove. Even if it could be proved, Grove is in right with the big politicians. A lot of people maybe ain't so honest as you'd think. The lawyer said it would take time—and money—and I didn't have money. I know this thing, my friend, but who would believe it if a bum like me said it?"

"Ah!" Doyle's attention was on thoughts of his own. What he had heard spurred his mind, made him plan and scheme.

CHAPTER VI.

UP TO THE COLONEL.

ON a fine afternoon about two weeks after Larry Doyle's talk with Culmbacher, Harrison B. Grove walked sedately down the street.

Harrison B. Grove's neatly parted whiskers billowed benignly about his smooth, bland face. Frequently he lifted his square-crowned, wide-brimmed, black felt hat, now to a humble woman in a shawl, now to a prosperous matron in furs, again to a giggling flapper, and always with the same old-time air and courtly flourish.

Each lift of the hat disclosed his highly polished dome with its fringe of long gray hair, a dome that had the clean-swept neatness of something sacred. The wind toyed with Harrison B. Grove's full-skirted, loose, black coat and his wide trousers. His gold-headed cane tapped in perfect synchronization with his sedate pace. He looked a symbol of beneficence.

He stopped to chat with mothers about their offspring, with wives about their husbands, sometimes bestowing a penny on a grimy child, patting the cheeks of babies. Men asked with friendly concern about the progress of his campaign for alderman. They shook his hand and wished him well.

Tony, the bootblack, ceased polishing long enough to touch his ragged hat brim in salutation. A sprightly young patrolman held up traffic, while the colonel crossed the street. Al Pincus, in the door of his barber shop, murmured reverentially: "Harrison B. Grove—good man. You know what I mean? Good!"

That afternoon Jo Mulhall, the district political boss, had said: "Colonel, it looks like you could get that election easy—a man that stands so high. You got 'em eating out of your hand!"

Harrison B. Grove stopped to admire the stone drinking fountain on the corner, especially the bronze plate which read:

FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD
THE GIFT OF
HARRISON B. GROVE.

Of his public benefactions, this gave him greatest pleasure—especially the bronze tablet.

It gave him innocent pleasure, too, to observe in shop windows his own portrait on a placard announcing his candidacy. Larry Doyle's popular cigar store, he noticed, flaunted not one, but rows of these placards across its windows. Harrison B. Grove was touched by the display. Very nice of Doyle, that, very good, indeed! As though in answer to the unspoken words, Larry Doyle appeared at the door of his shop. Grove greeted him with especial benevolence.

If Harrison B. Grove's eyesight had been very keen, or if he had been of a

mean, suspicious nature, he might have felt uneasy at the expression which flitted over Doyle's face at first sight of the great man, but as it was, he was too overflowing with the generous emotions a man gains by contemplating his own good deeds. Doyle's expression as they met was again quite its old, deferential self.

"Got a minute to spare, colonel?"

"For you, Mr. Doyle, always."

"Got something I want to discuss with you. Want you to do me a great favor, in fact—great favor——" Doyle hesitated, looking abashed. "Say, have a cigar?"

"As you know," said Colonel Grove with a smile, "I do not smoke, but my friends——"

"Sure, take a couple for your friends!"

Colonel Grove did.

"Now about this idea of mine, colonel," went on Doyle, "I—you've been a great friend to me—advising me, helping me, everything. Like a—like a father—almost——"

Colonel Grove waved aside the idea.

"Yes, sir! Almost like a father," continued Doyle. "Well, I had an idea—might be a chance to make a little out of it—if I had your permission. It would come like a sort of appreciation, not only from me, but from everybody around here. If you would allow it——"

"Allow what, my boy?" Colonel Grove purred the question.

Doyle hesitated, stepping back to eye his benefactor more closely. "Colonel," he exclaimed, much moved, "it would be a knock-out! With your name—and your picture on it! The very face for a label!"

"Well, well, my boy! I don't seem to follow you."

"Colonel Grove," Doyle clapped him on the shoulder in his enthusiasm, "I want your permission to use your name and picture on a new cigar—a cigar I intend to launch: The Harrison B. Grove! Do you get the idea? The Harrison B. Grove cigar! They'd sell like hot cakes in this neighborhood. And they'd help your campaign, too! Why, you could hand 'em out at rallies and club meetings! Do you see my idea now?

"The Harrison B. Grove cigar with some kind of a slogan under the name like 'A cigar as good as the man!' It would immortalize you, Colonel Grove, and all I need is your photograph and permission to go ahead—and maybe a small loan to get the labels printed. Can't you visualize it, colonel? Can't you see the effect of rows of boxes with that picture on every cover and on every cigar band? A knock-out, I tell you!"

The colonel considered the idea gravely, parting his whiskers with judicial calm. A smile grew slowly upon his lips. The great head nodded gently. "Meritorious," he conceded. "A meritorious idea, Larry."

"A tribute!" Doyle cried, a catch in his voice from emotion. "A tribute from your friends and neighbors—a tribute from me to my benefactor—modest, perhaps, but a tribute!"

CHAPTER VII.

"AS GOOD AS THE MAN."

ON her way to work at Al Pincus' barber shop, Flo Murphy saw Doyle's cigar store from afar. In fact, nobody with normal eyesight could help but see it that morning. Breathless with interest, Flo quickened her step to learn the meaning of the bright banners that almost totally obscured Doyle's show windows.

Across the front of the store, a great banner ran. It declared unmistakably:

A CIGAR AS GOOD AS THE MAN
THE HARRISON B. GROVE
TWO FOR 25 CENTS

Crimson pennants bearing a gold legend said the same thing. So also did numerous examples of the show-card writer's art. And on each announcement was the portrait of Harrison B. Grove, whiskers, sacred bald head, benevolence, and all.

The show windows were filled with row on row of boxes, covers open to display the same legend and the same portrait. The neat rows of closely packed cigars in their rich brown wrappers showed the duplicate of this cover in miniature on hundreds of embossed paper bands.

Even as Flo looked, a wagon turned the corner. Its high sides were covered with

painted signs bearing that same announcement.

Flo burst breathlessly into the shop. "Larry Doyle! What in the world——"

"Did you see it?" Doyle grinned. "See the new cigar I'm launching?"

"See it! Did I see anything else! Do you mean to tell me you're responsible for this——"

"I am!" Doyle declared. "I am! Sole proprietor, inventor, and manufacturer—at least I'm hiring old man Culmbacher—you remember him, Flo—and he's supervising the cigarmakers for me."

"Larry! Are you crazy? This—this must cost a lot! How can you——"

"It does cost a lot," Doyle agreed cheerfully. "Quite a lot, Flo. But I'll whisper something—twenty-five thousand of these cigars were bought up and paid for in advance by Harrison B. Grove. He's going to use 'em for campaign material. So all the bills are paid, and there's a profit left over for Culmbacher and me. Quite a decent little profit."

"Larry!" Flo shook her head in bewilderment. "Larry! After what Harrison B. Grove did to you—and Culmbacher—and those others! After all his swindles——"

Doyle's grin only widened. "It's a tribute, Flo," he declared. "A tribute from me—and all of us—to a good man."

"Larry! I think you've lost your senses entirely!"

"No! No; I haven't. I—— Say, you don't smoke, do you, Flo?"

"Don't be absurd, Larry!"

"All right. Never mind. Run along and don't worry—and Flo!" Doyle caught her in his arms for a brief caress. "If business keeps up, like it promises this morning, maybe we'll get married after all—pretty soon!"

It was a busy day for Harrison B. Grove, busy with many errands of beneficence.

Jo Mulhall, the district leader, had advised him recently: "You'd better shake a leg, colonel. Show the voters you're out for the job. It's not enough just being popular; you got to keep 'em reminded what a big guy you are. Get around. Mix. Spend a little money——"

"I was thinking of cigars," said Harrison B. Grove modestly. "While it is true I do not smoke, most voters do. I thought perhaps the present of a box of excellent cigars here, there, and elsewhere—among say a thousand substantial friends and citizens."

"Good idea!" Mulhall said. "First-rate idea, colonel."

"A brand bearing my name and picture," Harrison B. Grove explained. "A pleasant reminder of my standing——"

"Great!" Jo Mulhall applauded. "Corking idea!"

On such friends and admirers as Al Pincus, Harrison B. Grove called that day. He came in a rented automobile, a big, closed car, piled to its roof with boxed cigars. With one of these boxes under his arm, Grove entered the shop and made his presentation.

When the brief visit concluded with warm handshakes and mutual best wishes, Pincus declared loudly to Flo Murphy: "There goes about the biggest man this town'll ever know. A big man, Flo!"

Flo said nothing.

"Positively! Al Pincus declared, opening the gift box and admiring the neat top row of rich-brown tobacco leaf, each cigar incased in its scarlet-and-gold band that bore the portrait of Harrison B. Grove. " 'As good as the man,' " Pincus read the legend, struck with admiration. "I bet that's a good cigar!" He selected a cigar and lighted it, holding it afar to admire the lovely label.

"A good man, Harrison B. Grove," Pincus declared. "You know how I mean—good!"

Flo muttered something under her breath.

Pincus puffed. "Does a lot of good—everybody's friend," he said dreamily. "There ain't many more like him left in N'York, Flo. Belongs to the good, old days when a citizen lived in a house and tried to do kind deeds by all his neighbors. A fine man——"

"Al!" Flo interrupted sharply. "Something's on fire!"

Al Pincus, too, was sniffing, alarm in his face. "By gorry, I guess there is! Maybe I dropped a spark in my coat!" He removed the coat and shook it anxiously. They searched the shop, the cigar in Pincus' mouth being puffed furiously in his excitement.

After five minutes fruitless search, Pincus removed the cigar from his lips thoughtfully. "Flo," he said, "I guess I smoke too much in business hours. I guess maybe I do. Seems to me like it." Languidly he walked to the door and tossed his cigar away. He remained leaning there, gulping in the frosty air.

"Let's open all the windows a minute," Flo suggested, after a thoughtful pause.

The Old Guard Athletic & Social Club met that night in their second-story clubrooms. It was a special meeting, and the hall was crowded, with standees packed like sardines around the walls and fresh air scarcer than coal in January.

The club's president announced: "Boys, we got something special on for this evening, a regular treat. We have with us one who needs no introduction among you, a neighbor and a friend to every man, woman, and child in the district, a man that we all admire, and the man who's going to be our next alderman——"

All eyes turned to Harrison B. Grove, radiating benevolence as he sat on the platform, absent-mindedly stroking his neatly parted whiskers. A tremendous cheer broke out.

"But before Colonel Grove speaks to you," the president went on, when there was quiet at last, "he has asked me to let you in on a little surprise. Colonel Grove says the smokes are on him tonight, and he wants every friend and admirer in this audience to smoke hearty and take away as a gift from him a box of the swell, two-for-a-quarter cigar that's just been put out by our well-known local manufacturer, Mr. Larry Doyle, as a tribute to our leading citizen. Gentlemen, read the label. It says: 'A cigar as good as the man!' That must be some cigar! When you smoke that cigar, remember in your enjoyment the kind of man that's asking your suffrance to represent you down at city hall. Will the ushers please pass the cigars?"

The ushers did their duty amid applause. Every man took plenty. Pockets bulged with the Harrison B. Grove, the cigar as good as the man. A rapid fire of crackling matches ran through the crowd, and smoke ascended, clouds of smoke. Harrison B. Grove stepped to the front, greeted by riotous applause.

Harrison B. Grove began to speak amid smothered coughing. The coughing grew worse, and the attempts of noncoughers to hush it added to the uproar. Here and there a man began to fight his way toward an exit. Others, wedged in beyond hope of escape, sat or leaned in a sickly daze, their fingers holding fast-burning cigars, their eyes growing glassy. Even Harrison B. Grove, who did not smoke, began to feel the influence of that rich, thick, smoke-laden air, deadly as tear gas. His speech faltered. With lame abruptness, it ended. He had no time for handshakes in his dash for a door.

"Do something!" bellowed Jo Mulhall, the district leader, to the whiskered candidate for alderman. "You do something quick, or you'll drag the whole ticket down to defeat. You go to this guy, Larry Doyle, and get that cigar off the market. Hear me! Gather up the last one and burn it!"

"I can't understand this, Jo," Harrison B. Grove protested tearfully. "I can't make it out. Those cigars——"

"I can make it out, fast enough. You been played for a sucker, that's what. Those cigars would kill a horse!"

"But—Doyle seems to admire me so. He wanted to help my campaign, he said. A modest little tribute to me——"

"Tribute—wah! Any more tributes like that, and we'll all be looking for jobs on the white wings. He's ruined you, that's all. Made you the laughing-stock of the voters. 'A cigar as good as the man!' Wow!"

"Do you think," Harrison B. Grove demanded, reddening, "do you possibly imagine that Larry Doyle meant this thing as—ah—— Do you suppose he had a hidden purpose—some plan to knife me in the back——"

"I tell you what I know," replied Mulhall. "If Larry Doyle sold you three thousand dollars' worth of those cigars, he's too smart a business man to be running a corner cigar store. He ought to be down to city hall or in Wall Street! He certainly played you for a boob!"

"I wonder"—Harrison B. Grove muttered, deeply thoughtful. "I wonder if——"

"Don't wonder! Don't waste time

wondering! If you can't get results any other way, get an ax and kill Larry Doyle. The voters might forgive you murder—but not those cigars."

CHAPTER VIII.

IT COULD BE IMPROVED.

IT'S all right, honey; we get married whenever you set the day!" Larry Doyle grinned widely as he clasped Flo Murphy closer.

"Larry!"

"Yep. All settled. My store rent's back to fifty a month, like it was when I started. Signed a ten-year lease this afternoon."

"How did you do it?" asked Flo.

"The Harrison B. Grove cigar did it," Doyle answered proudly. "It's going to make my fortune—our fortune! Grove demanded I take it off the market. I refused. I've got his permission in writing to use his name and picture. He can't make me stop—and he knows it. After I had rubbed that in plenty, I suggested, just gently suggested, that maybe the quality of the cigar could be improved, provided I didn't have to stand such a heavy expense in rent. Grove saw the light! He hustled around the corner and brought me back my lease."

"Larry!"

Doyle's grin grew wider. "'The Harrison B. Grove,'" he quoted. "'A cigar as good as the man!' Maybe after a while, the way things look, we can make Harrison B. Grove somewhere near as good as the cigar—and it's the world's worst!"

Remembering the cigar that Al Pincus had smoked, Flo nodded.

HIS MODEST DESIRES

By Key Daniels

AS in the ways of life I go,
 I do not yearn for wealth untold;
I know that heaps and heaps of dough
 Would bring but troubles manifold;
 I could not sleep, endowed with gold,
For fear some one would steal my stuff,
 And so, while I am growing old,
I merely ask for just enough.

I would possess a bungalow
 To shield me from the rain and cold,
And from the winter winds that blow
 Across the bleak and cheerless wold;
 A twin-six, speed and beauty's mold,
To climb the hills without a muff;
 These things to me I would have doled—
I merely ask for just enough.

Then I would laugh at bitter woe,
 If kindly Fate would let me hold
Some gilt-edged bonds, whose worth would grow
 The longer they were kept unsold;
 Whose coupons clipped would keep enrolled
My servants and would call the bluff
 Of the gaunt wolf, who's oft so bold—
I merely ask for just enough.

L'ENVOI.

I have so wisely learned to know
 That gold can smooth ways that are rough,
But I would be no Crœsus, so
 I merely ask for just enough.

A Tale of Baffling Mystery and Intrigue

In the Clutch of the Circle



By George Goodchild

WHILE employed as chief draftsman by Agnots, an English toolmaking concern, Jim Cartwright learned that the concern was being used as a cloak by a powerful criminal organization. The gang was divided into the Inner Circle, composed of the leaders who planned the crimes, and the Outer Circle, those who put the plans into effect. Ciphero, or "Number One," a man whose identity was a secret, was the head of the gang.

Cartwright planned to seek another position, but hesitated because he was interested in Violet Dixon, a stenographer who worked in the office. He received a telegram signed with her name, requesting him to meet her at a railroad station in London. While waiting, he saw a closed car drive by. Violet waved to him from the machine, then some one in the automobile grasped her arm, forcibly preventing her from joining him.

Taking a taxicab, Cartwright followed the fleeing machine, but could not catch it. She was compelled to enter a large residence. Intent upon coming to her aid, Cartwright forced his way in through a window. He was struck down, arrested, and accused of burglary. The testimony of McCarthy, the supposed owner of the house, resulted in Cartwright's being convicted and sent to prison.

Cartwright discovered that Dawson, one of the jailers, had at one time been a crook. He made Dawson temporarily take his place in the cell and, wearing the warder's clothes, made his way to London, planning to help Violet escape.

The criminals had threatened her, but she had refused to obey their commands. Ciphero, his face covered with a mask of clay, became impatient. With Spiller, Conway, and McCarthy, three men who were likewise members of the Inner Circle, looking on, Ciphero began to try to hypnotize her. Before this could be accomplished, Jim Cartwright, an automatic pistol in his hand, crashed into the room through a window.

CHAPTER IX.

MINUTES OF DANGER.

FOR a second, Jim Cartwright stood facing the four men in the room. His cap was pulled down over his eyes. None of them appeared to recognize him, which was not unnatural, seeing that they believed their late dupe to be in a Dartmoor cell. Spiller's hand moved toward a drawer under the table.

"Don't move!" ordered Cartwright, the pistol ready. "I am going——"

He halted as Ciphero's face came round and gasped to behold those astonishing features. Violet, in the meantime, had gained control of herself. The sight of Cartwright had held her temporarily speechless. She was about to run to him when Ciphero caught her by the arm.

"Wait!" he commanded. "We will first of all find out what this lunatic wants."

"If you take another step, I'll pull the trigger!" declared Cartwright. "Take your hands off her, or I'll drop you where you stand——"

At this instant, Spiller took the opportunity to get the revolver out of the drawer. He raised it, but Cartwright fired first. Spiller uttered a yell and sank down in his chair with one hand gripping his arm. The revolver clattered to the floor. Conway and McCarthy were at a loss to know what to do, but Ciphero waved them aside.

"Before I call the police I should like to know your object in breaking into this house," he remarked calmly.

"Call them!" said Cartwright. "And explain your object in abducting her!"

The next instant Ciphero's foot went out and pressed on a hidden switch. The room was plunged into darkness. A muffled cry came from close at hand. Cartwright dashed in that direction—for it was Violet's voice. By a stroke of luck he succeeded in touching her dress. The next moment his arm was around her, but she was being dragged away. He hit out with the butt of the revolver at a point in space where he judged her captor might be. The weapon found something hard and Violet was freed.

Cartwright pushed her behind him and backed round the table. A flash came from the other side of the table, and he blinked in the light of a powerful electric torch. He ducked and pushed the heavy table sideways. There was a crash, and darkness reigned again.

"The window!" whispered the sinister voice of Ciphero.

Cartwright saw a vague shadow pass between him and the window, which was faintly visible from where he stood. His hand sought for Violet and found her crouching near him. She trembled at his touch, but quickly understood. Her fingers caught his.

With one hand guiding her, Cartwright crept along the carpet toward where the legs of a man could be seen. The rest of the figure was hidden behind a curtain. It was evident that the only means of escape lay through the window, and enemies were waiting there for him. But whether more than one of them was actually behind the curtain he had no means of discovering.

The need being urgent, Cartwright decided to run the blockade without further delay. Reaching out his left hand he seized the man's leg by the ankle and brought its owner to the floor with a terrific crash. In his fall he displaced the opposite curtain. Cartwright saw a second form silhouetted against the sky. The next moment they were struggling. Enraged and desperate, Cartwright proved easily the superior and soon had his opponant laid out.

"Jim!"

The whisper came from outside of the window, and he was glad that Violet had taken the opportunity to get into the garden. He dived through the opening, just as his first adversary rose to his feet again and raised a cry. Catching Violet by the arm, Cartwright ran swiftly toward the main entrance.

"There is some one over there!" she whispered. "They've seen us and are coming!"

Cartwright could distinguish several figures running across the wide lawn, and when he turned his head there were two more emerging from the house. He immediately bolted round the back of the big building, hoping to find a way out in that direction, but he was ultimately brought to a halt by a high wall.

"We shall be cornered here!" he cried. "There seems to be safety yonder."

"Yes—yes!"

They flew across the lawn and reached the shadows of a dense mass of trees and bushes. A few minutes later they saw a light appear from the spot near the wall that they had left and heard the low murmur of voices, among which Cartwright had no difficulty in recognizing Spiller's.

"Is Quang on the gate?"

"Yes."

"Good. The other road is barred. They can't be far away."

Cartwright saw the light coming nearer and knew that their presence in the shrubbery was suspected. Anticipating a fight, he begged Violet to hide some distance away from him, but she refused stubbornly.

"I've been through so much," she whispered. "I'm not afraid so long as you are with me."

"S-sh!"

He could see four men in all, and it was evident they were armed and as desperate as he. They spread out as they neared the shrubbery, and the man with the torch came slowly forward. It was a powerful ray and revealed a portion of Violet's dress. Cartwright saw the figure halt and wave to the others.

"He's seen us!" whispered Violet.

"Looks like it. I'm afraid we stand no chance here. Better to attempt to rush the gate. Quick! Go right through the bushes and step carefully."

Without a word she obeyed him. He

followed her swiftly, and they came out on the other side. The high wall ran all round the property, and between the two exits onto the main road was spreading lawn. He knew they must be seen by the sentries on the two gates, but all things considered that way was the least risky.

"Come!" he whispered. "Keep immediately behind me—in case they shoot. When I attack the man, run into the main road and turn to the right. Are you ready?"

"Yes."

Cartwright made for the nearer gate, but to his horror saw there were three men there, instead of only one, as he had expected. It was evident that in the meantime Ciphero had routed up more assistants from his staff of crooks. Realizing that it would be madness to attempt an attack, Cartwright turned abruptly toward the house and ran down some steps that appeared to lead to the servants' quarters. Violet came close on his heels.

"Won't we be trapped here?" she asked.

"We may be, but I am hoping to find a telephone. At any rate we may be able to hold them at bay until daylight. It will be easier then. Look—there is an open door!"

They made toward it and found it gave on a long corridor. Leading out of this were several other doors. Cartwright peeped through one of them and saw a kind of pantry, packed with provisions. Away to the right were more steps going down. These seemed a little more inviting and, moreover, commanded quick access to the garden, when the coast was clear.

"Down there!" whispered Cartwright. "Hurry! They are coming."

The vault into which they ultimately emerged was evidently used as a wine cellar. A match revealed several bins, containing dusty bottles, and in the far corner was a huge hogshead. The place was fitted with an electric light, but Cartwright considered it inadvisable to switch it on. There was a large bolt on the inside of the door. This he pushed home.

"Do you think they saw us enter the house?" asked Violet.

"I don't know, but they must arrive at that conclusion in the course of time. Let us see how far the cellar extends."

An investigation by the aid of lighted matches showed the vault to be a regular catacomb. There was little doubt that it must have been part of a much older house. There were passages leading in every direction, and Cartwright's supply of matches was quite inadequate to complete the tour. He sat down on a box some distance from the door and close to Violet.

"It's very quiet," she whispered. "They must have missed us."

"It looks like it."

"What do you propose doing?"

"Waiting here until they all retire and then make a bid for freedom."

"I hope we will succeed in escaping. I have been a prisoner so long."

This made him realize that they were each in the dark as to the other's adventures during the months gone, also that in the excitement he had overlooked the queer part she had played on that night when the gang had put him away.

"You mean you have been a prisoner here?" he asked.

"Yes. Ever since that night when I saw you at Hampstead."

"That is months ago!" Cartwright exclaimed. "Tell me what happened then —after I got your telegram."

"Telegram! I sent no telegram."

A low exclamation of surprise left his lips. He was beginning to understand that she was absolutely unaware of the facts, innocent in the matter.

"I received a telegram from you asking me to meet you at Hampstead Tube," said Cartwright. "I went there and saw you leaning out of a car. You beckoned to me, and I saw a hand—a man's hand —draw you back. Feeling that something was wrong, I took a cab and followed you to this very house. If you did not send the telegram you must have known I was meeting you—for you waved."

"I didn't know I—should see you," she replied quickly. "I was on my way back from the country, when I saw Spiller—at Waterloo Station. He stopped and talked to me and walked with me as far as the cabs. I told him I was catching a bus home, but he said he was going in

the same direction and invited me to share his taxi. I had no suspicions, and as it was raining I accepted. He was quite polite and well behaved and talked a lot about things that were interesting. I didn't notice that we were going in the wrong direction until I found myself near Hampstead Tube Station. I asked him what he meant by bringing me there, but instead of replying he pointed through the window—and I saw you."

"Yes!"

"I leaned out and waved," Violet continued, "and told the driver to stop, but instead of stopping he went all the faster. Then Spiller pulled me back and held both my arms. I knew then that he had some plot on hand and fought with him. He—he struck me brutally. Then we arrived here and two men came out to meet the car. They took me inside and locked me in a small room in the basement."

"What happened after that?" asked Cartwright.

"Spiller came to see me regularly. I asked him to explain his extraordinary conduct, but he only laughed. After a few days he and a gray-haired tall man called McCarthy visited me. They made a proposal that took my breath away. Oh, it was horrid and so unexpected that I was dumfounded."

"What was it?"

"They told me that you were a prisoner in their hands—that you were a—a thief and a member of a gang wanted by the police——"

"The liars!"

"I knew it was a lie, but all the same I was compelled to believe the other part, for when I was being carried into the house I saw you enter the drive. I knew then that my capture was a ruse to get you into the house. They said that your freedom depended upon my doing what I was told. I was to go with them to a certain place and meet a certain man. If he proposed to me I was to marry him——"

"What!"

"I am telling you exactly what they said. They promised me that he would have no claim on me after that. Of course I refused," Violet went on. "Again and again they came, hoping to break my spirit in time. They starved me for a month and only fed me again when they saw that I was nearly dead. Then they took me to another room, a large one, painted a brilliant blue. There were bars at the windows. When darkness came—oh, I can't tell you the horrors of that place! There were terrible cries, strange lights and forms. I went nearly mad with fright. I——"

Cartwright realized that she was trembling and put his arm round her shoulders to comfort her. If his heart was hard before, it was harder now. The whole thing puzzled him, however.

"The fiends!" he exclaimed. "I wish I had warned you before. Spiller is a crook in the service of a gang called the Inner Circle. Agnots' was only a cover for their schemes. I wanted to tell you this, but I had no definite proof and feared that you might think me insane."

"Agnots a crooked business!" she ejaculated. "Yes, yes; I see it all now. But what happened to you that night? Did they imprison you somewhere in this house?"

"No. They did even worse. They planned a robbery in this very place, knocked me senseless, and put some jewels in my pocket. Then they called the police and gave me in charge. I—I was sent away for five years' penal servitude."

She gave a little cry of horror at this news, and he felt her hand moving on his, caressing his fingers sympathetically. Her own imprisonment explained her silence. He reproved himself for having for one moment suspected her of complicity.

"But how did you get here?" she whispered.

"I managed to escape. I must go back to prison again, though. I have given my word of honor to an officer who helped me."

"Go back again!"

"Yes—and to-morrow."

He laughed grimly as he reflected that they were not yet out of the net. Violet shuddered, for she realized that soon she would be alone again.

"What does it all mean?" she asked. "It is clear they have a big scheme on hand, but where do you come in? Why should they go to all that trouble to put you in prison?"

"That is where the great 'Number One'—the man with the clay mask—showed himself a bad judge of men. He thinks I may be a useful tool in his hands and means to get me out of prison by some means when it has broken me and driven me to desperation. Then he will have me in his power. The least sign of rebellion, and back I should go."

"Then that man with the mask is the one called Ciphero?"

"Yes. A curious name."

"It must have something to do with the sign of the gang—a small circle, a cipher."

"Yes! I never thought of that. Now I remember that some of the men at Agnots had a small circle branded on their forearms. Violet, it would be a great service to humanity if some one should break up this gang."

"Yes; but I fear it will be difficult for you to do. Promise me you will take care. Ciphero is a fiend incarnate. I know that every instruction comes from him. Under his mask he may be a powerful person, whom no one can touch."

"We can touch him, once we can get evidence enough to convict him. I suppose you have no idea where he lives?"

"No. I don't think that even Spiller or the others know that. He seems to have them all completely in his power. To-day was the first time I had seen him. He frightened me so much. When—when you came in he had me nearly hypnotized. I am so glad you came in time."

Suddenly there came a slight noise from the direction of the door. They listened intently, but heard nothing more. After a few minutes Cartwright crept toward the door. An idea had come to him, and it was not a pleasant one. He gently slipped the bolt and tried the handle. The door was locked from the outside.

CHAPTER X.

AN INVISIBLE ENEMY.

IMMEDIATELY, Cartwright crept back to Violet and reported the latest development. Curiously enough neither of them had thought of this possibility. "Perhaps they have locked it in the usual course of things," said Violet. "It does not prove that they know we are here."

"I wish I could think so," remarked Cartwright.

"But if they knew we were here, surely they would come in and attempt to capture us."

"I think not. They know I have the pistol, and in such a place as this an armed man would be a dangerous person. I think they must have searched all the other parts of the house and then found a footprint leading here."

"What do you think they intend doing?"

"Starve us into submission perhaps."

Time passed, and Jim Cartwright relapsed into silence. They appeared to have jumped out of the frying pan into the fire. Then an overlooked fact caused him to change his mind concerning the object of their captors. The cellar was full of wine. At least they would not die of thirst.

"I must explore again," he whispered. "They know that thirst will not bother us, as we have the wine. They have some other plan in mind. There may be another entrance to this place, and I don't want to be taken unawares. Will you wait here?"

"Let me come, too," she pleaded.

"If you insist——"

He stopped as a knock sounded on the stout door. He made no response, and a few minutes later it was repeated, louder than before. After a brief pause a voice was heard.

"It's all right; we know where you are. Come closer, I want to talk."

Cartwright walked to the door, but kept his body shielded by the wall in case of trickery. He feared that the speaker might riddle the door with bullets in the hope of hitting the man behind it.

"Can you hear me?"

"Well!" snapped Cartwright.

"We will give you a chance of life—whoever you are."

"Go on."

"There is a barred window about fifty feet along the cellar and about six feet from the floor, on the left. If you will put your pistol through the bars we will unlock this door and set you free."

"How kind of you! What about my companion!"

"That has nothing to do with you."

"You are a little mistaken there," declared Cartwright. "But you needn't waste your breath. I am not insane enough to give up my means of defense. We have only to wait till morning and attract some one's attention. If need be we can live here for quite a long time, since we have a stock of wine."

"You fool! Unless you take advantage of this offer, to-morrow you may be a corpse."

"I'll risk that."

"You mean you refuse?"

"Of course!"

"Very well! Take the consequences."

A trifle apprehensive, Cartwright walked back to Violet. She had heard all the conversation and approved of his attitude.

"We couldn't trust them," she whispered. "That was McCarthy speaking. He is as cunning as a fox. What do you think they intend doing now?"

"I really can't imagine. If they tried to rush the place I could hold my own from behind one of the pillars. It might mean that there is another way down here, but in that case they wouldn't have tried to bargain with me, but would have taken us by surprise. Nevertheless we must explore, and since they are no longer in any doubt that they know where we are, we can use the electric light. I'll find the switch."

He lighted a match and at length found the switches. There were four of them, and he pushed all of them down. The place became well illuminated, and their spirits rose with the banishment of the inky blackness. For the first time he had a chance to look at his companion. Her face was a trifle drawn and pallid. All the suffering she had gone through was clearly marked on her beautiful features. She blushed to find his glance resting on her so intently.

"The fiends!" he exclaimed. "To treat you like this!"

"I'm getting better now. It was the month of semistarvation that pulled me down the most, and then the Blue Room—— But you must not worry about me too much. You perhaps have suffered even more."

"Some one else is going to suffer before this is over," declared Cartwright. "They shall pay for you and me, and for my—my mother."

She looked at him with moist, questioning eyes. "Is your mother——"

"She died while I was in prison. I came back to find her buried. I was all she had in the world, and without me she got lonely and gave up all hope."

"I'm so sorry," Violet murmured. "So sorry! But I fear we are fighting against overwhelming odds."

"We shall see. Come, let us see what lies yonder."

They went forward and passed the grating mentioned by McCarthy, but even as Cartwright looked at it, some one on the outside was busy nailing boards over it. It was a curious act, for the window was not large enough to permit of egress.

"They are taking no risks with us!" commented Cartwright.

Proceeding, they turned to the right and along another passage. It led to a blank wall, and they were forced to return. A passage to the left led them into a low-ceilinged room where rats scampered away, and the air was poor. From this room, another passage led down some steps and ended at an iron door, which was fastened with a huge padlock. Cartwright tried the lock, but it was powerful enough to withstand the onslaught of a large hammer.

"It's strange—this door," he mused. "Where can it lead? It goes away from the house and has not been used for at least ten years."

"It's awfully close down here," said Violet. "I feel as if I were choking."

They went back along the passage and at length emerged into the main wine cellar. As they reached it, Cartwright pricked up his ears. There was a curious hissing sound, coming from the direction of the door. Puzzled, he crept toward it, and then suddenly recoiled as the pungent smell of gas came to his nostrils.

"What is it?" gasped Violet.

"Gas. Don't come near!"

He got another whiff, and his brain reeled. It was coming from under the door. He went down on his knees and held his breath while he tried to find the place of entry, but after a few seconds he was driven back coughing.

"Do they mean to poison us?" she asked.

"I don't know. Never thought of this. Now I see why they nailed up the grating. That is the only means of ventilation. We must get farther away."

They hurried down the room and through a passage into the room. The air was clearer there, but soon the gas began to enter, and there was no door to keep it out. It grew stronger and stronger as the minutes went by. Both of them were now gasping for breath.

"How—how long can we stand this?" Violet inquired.

"Not long. They must have a big pressure of gas at work. I'm sorry I got you into this hole."

"You—sorry! Why, all my thanks are due to you. I would rather die this way than be left to their mercies."

"Die! We are not going to die. There must be some way out of it. Besides, it is evident that they want you for the purpose of carrying out their projected scheme. No; this is not intended to kill us, but only to render me incapable of action. Once we are unconscious, they will find some way to clear the cellar of gas and get down to us."

"If only we could break through the iron door—that might lead somewhere."

"I was thinking of that, but there seems to be nothing that I can use——"

Violet suddenly staggered and caught him by the shoulder to steady herself. She had just taken a gulp of gas into her lungs with painful results. He drew her away from the spot and ordered her to lie flat on the floor, with a view to obtaining the thin layer of good air there.

Cartwright felt sick and dazed. He knew that something must be done quickly, if they were going to escape. What could he do? His eyes roved over the room. There were some bricks in a corner, a few loose floor boards, and the stout haft of an ax, which had been sawn off from the head for some reason or other. He searched for the head in the vain hope that he could fix it to the handle. Ten precious minutes were wasted.

Then he remembered the barred window in the inner room. Here was a chance—a faint one. Taking the ax handle, he crawled along the passage, breathing painfully and with his mouth within six inches of the floor. In the inner room, the gas was now dense. He held his breath and went toward the bars. They were two feet long by an inch in diameter and were separated from each other by about three inches.

There was just room to permit the use of the ax handle as a lever, and in order to make the best use of it, Cartwright stood on a box. As he had hoped, the cement into which the bars were embedded was aged and crumbling. He put all of his weight into the effort. The top of the bar was loosened. He threw down the lever and seizing the bar wrenched it downward violently. It came away in his hand.

Cartwright staggered across to the passage and plunged through it, not daring to breathe until he was on the other side. Then he gulped down the less poisonous atmosphere in the room where Violet was and displayed his new ally, the iron bar.

"A splendid idea!" said the girl. "You mean to force the padlock with that?"

"I mean to try. How are you feeling?"

"Terrible."

"Come—let us try the farther passage and the door. But don't hope for too much. It may lead nowhere."

Together they descended the steps and soon came to the rusted door. Violet sat down against the wall while he wrestled with the huge padlock. He managed to get the end of the bar through the loop, but the thing held together tenaciously. For a quarter of an hour, Cartwright stuck to his task, and all the time the gas crept into every corner. Violet was sitting very still, with her head resting on her hands.

"Got it!"

The cry of victory came hoarsely from his lips. The broken padlock fell at his feet. He looked at Violet, but she was still sitting motionless.

"Violet!" he cried.

She did not answer.

Cartwright stooped and touched her shoulder, but she made no response. Then he realized that she was unconscious. He seized the handle of the door and swung it open. It was very dark beyond, and the passage was merely a tunnel through

the earth. Knowing nothing of where it ended, and filled with alarm for his companion's welfare, he caught her in his arms and passed through the door, slamming it behind him to keep back the gas as much as possible.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE UNDERGROUND PASSAGE.

THE dank passage wound round and round strangely. At times Jim Cartwright banged his head against the roof, and more than once he fell over some unseen obstacle. His great hope, however, lay in the fact that a current of air blew continually on his face. Then his feet splashed in water. It came higher and higher, until he was wet to the knees. He hesitated whether to go on. At any moment he might step into a hole where the water was ten feet deep. To strike a match was impossible, for there was nowhere to put the unconscious Violet while he did so. Cartwright moved forward by inches. The water deepened until it was level with his thighs. Then there came a shallower patch, and soon he was standing on dry earth again.

There was no sign of the gas now, and the wind was a trifle stronger. He turned a sharp corner and found the tunnel narrowing alarmingly. It grew smaller only for a distance of four or five yards, however, then it widened out again. Then—he could scarcely believe his eyes—he emerged under the stars!

So far as he could see, he was in a disused sand pit of big dimensions. Near the exit of the tunnel was a patch of grass that had sprung up in the gravel during the years when work had ceased there. Cartwright sat down for a time and then succeeded in bringing Violet to consciousness.

"Where—where are we?" she gasped.

"I don't know, but certainly in the open air. How are you feeling now?"

"Not very good, but this fresh, sweet air is glorious. But are we safe here?" she said in sudden fright. "This sand pit may be in some part of the land belonging to that house."

"Quite likely, but they will not have followed us yet. You must recover your strength before we go on."

"I am ready now—quite ready. Jim, it's so beautiful to be free again. Don't let us risk anything by lingering here. If they catch you, they will kill you and take me away again. I couldn't stand it again—I couldn't!"

Cartwright could understand her emotion. They had almost succeeded in breaking her health and spirit. Giving her his arm, he made across the uneven ground and eventually came out into an open field. A few hundred yards away was the black bulk of the sinister house and in the other direction some street lights. Neither of them carried a watch, but Cartwright thought that it was about two o'clock.

When they reached a street, Cartwright decided that it was later than he had thought—three-thirty, and scarcely a living soul was to be seen. The prospect of walking to Chelsea was not a pleasant one, for he was wet up to his waist. Violet was weak and exhausted. Luck favored them, a mile farther on. They came upon an all-night garage and managed to hire a conveyance.

When they arrived at the flat, Cartwright gave Violet into the care of Mrs. Farring, who had waited anxiously for his return. The sight of him, drenched to the skin, and Violet also, caused her to open her eyes in bewilderment. Mrs. Farring realized, however, that it was no time to ask questions, and an hour later the household was asleep.

On the following day, Violet was much better, and Cartwright felt no ill results from the adventure, Mrs. Farring was confided in to a certain extent and was ready to do all she could for him, but she was nervous about anything connected with the police. She hoped that she would not be called upon to shelter the escaped convict in the flat.

"What are we going to do now?" asked Violet.

Cartwright found himself in a quandary. Much as he wanted to stay with her and protect her against further molestation, he was reluctant to break his promise to the warder.

"I must go back," he said.

"To—to prison?"

"Yes."

"But you are innocent!"

"I was convicted."

"And I—— What am I to do?"

"That is the problem."

"I must of course go back to my old room——"

"No."

"But my clothes and few belongings are there!"

"It would be too dangerous. They are bound to watch that place, expecting you to return. It is better for you to stay here. Mrs. Farring will be going to her own home in a few days. You can stay here as long as you like. The furniture was my mother's, and there is a year's lease yet on the flat."

Violet was reluctant to accept this offer, but, as the day passed, she was forced to see that it offered great advantages. Cartwright got Mrs. Farring to insist that Violet accept some money as a loan, until she got a new position and was able to repay it. Nevertheless, she knew it came from Jim Cartwright and her gratitude was deep.

"You have done so much for me," Violet whispered. "I wish I could do a little for you. If only I could get that man McCarthy to confess the cruel plot against you——"

"Don't try," he begged. "Whatever you do, don't let them find you again. It is unlikely that they will look here for you, for they imagine I am safely locked up in jail. I am positive none of them recognized me."

"Now that we have found that house shouldn't we tell the police—and about Agnots, too?"

"I fear it would be useless. McCarthy poses as a wealthy man. He is probably highly respected in the neighborhood, and no one would credit our story. Then when it was known that you have associated with me—a convict! No; we cannot fight the Inner Circle that way."

"What other way is there? You said you had to serve a sentence of five years —five years——"

Her lip trembled as she spoke. She contemplated with terror that period of waiting. Nor did she give full expression to all the fears which possessed her. Cartwright imagined that she would be fairly safe in his place, but Violet had more knowledge of the Inner Circle than he did. She knew that the success of Ciphero's plans depended to a great extent upon her assistance, and that he would move heaven and earth to find her.

"After all, it isn't such a long time," said Cartwright. Then grimly, "Afterward, there will be many years left to deal with Ciphero's gang. I shall not be caught so easily again."

She accompanied him to the station that evening and again thanked him for all he had done. Under any other circumstances, he would have made known his innermost desire to her, asked her to wait until he was free again, told her that he cared for her. He could not utter the words at that time, however. Innocent or not, he was still a convict and he considered it was not honorable to propose to her. When he had served his sentence he could speak.

"Will you write to me—occasionally?" she asked.

"At every opportunity. If you reply, say nothing about the Inner Circle—as all the letters are read and censored. I am allowed only one letter——"

He suddenly stopped as he realized that her face had gone deathly pale. She was staring at a disappearing figure, whose face Cartwright had not seen.

"What is the matter?" he asked. "A doctor——"

"No. I—oh, it was only a fancy! Please don't worry about it."

She was evidently trying to minimize her fear, but her white face and trembling hands betrayed her real feelings. "Tell me whom you saw!" he demanded.

"It—it was the man with the mask—Ciphero. He was standing by the ticket window, watching us."

"Great heavens! Are you sure?"

"Could there be two men like that in the world!"

The train was about to depart, and Cartwright was torn with indecision. To go and leave her to the mercies of the gang seemed inhuman. Yet he had to go back to prison.

"You are wavering," she whispered. "You mustn't consider me. If he is watching, I can evade him."

"I hate to leave you!" he said passionately. "But at any rate we can foil him at the moment. Quick—jump aboard!"

He almost pulled her into the car as the whistle blew and the train steamed out.

"Why—why did you do that?" she gasped.

"We must change our plans. If that was Ciphero, it means that it will be unsafe to go back to the flat. He has followed us from there. There is no stop of any consequence before Exeter. You must get out there and find a room."

"But I have no baggage, and hotel keepers are not apt to welcome a woman alone, late at night."

"Then go to the police station and tell them that you are stranded. They will help you for one night. Then wire to Mrs. Farring and tell her that you will not be home and will write and explain."

"And after that?"

"You can find a place to live on a farm near the prison."

That suggestion seemed to appeal to her, but she realized that it could not go on indefinitely, as she had to earn her own living and was not well supplied with money.

"It will do for the present," said Cartwright. "You need a rest, and the fine moorland air will do you good. When you have an address, write me and let me know. No; better still—leave a note for me in a certain place. Listen—we are making a road from the prison to a quarry a mile to the west. You can't mistake the quarry as it is near a peculiar rock, shaped like a man's head. It is known as the Parson Stone. If you leave a note in the recess on the north side of the stone, I shall find it. But don't put any name on it."

"Yes."

"You must not go to the rock between the hours of nine in the morning and five in the afternoon."

"I understand."

"Sometimes you may see me with the gang, but do not make any sign of recognition."

She took careful note of all he said and promised to keep him well posted as to any happenings. The journey to Exeter passed all too quickly, and when she said good-by her eyes were moist. Then the prisoner was swept onward to his destination.

Left alone, Cartwright reflected on the events of that week-end. The death of his mother left him sad at heart, but desperate as well. Yet he was even denied the melancholy joy of thinking of the dead woman whom he had loved so deeply, for the problem of gaining entry to the prison on the morrow commanded all his attention. He wondered if the substitution had succeeded entirely. If not, he might have to pay dearly for his short span of freedom. Yet he had faith in the warder. It would not pay Dawson to give the game away.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FACE OF A FOE.

WITH a thoughtful frown on his face, Inspector Inch, of the Criminal Investigation Department, sat in the little café. His companion and fellow sleuth hound sighed as he drank a glass of milk and waited for Inch to speak. He had a great admiration for the other man's skill in his calling and for the unremitting energy with which he pursued it.

"It was a gigantic mistake, after all," mused Inch.

"Agnots?"

"Yes. We ought to have waited longer. But the chief was getting impatient. All we got was three old birds, whom I could have put my hands on at any time."

"No other evidence?"

"Nothing. As usual, they had got wind of it. There were tons of papers, but all of an innocent character. That other fellow—Spiller—had disappeared, too. The new manager we know nothing about. Oh, yes; it was a ghastly fiasco!"

"What did you expect to find?"

"Anything that would put us on the trail of the man behind the thing—the Number One, in other words, Ciphero."

"Perhaps we broke up the gang when we got Miller and that crowd. At any rate, it's curious there has been no other affair of any importance since."

"That's what makes it all the more certain that Ciphero has a big job on hand. A curious thing happened some months back. There was a girl at Agnots—a pretty girl. She disappeared suddenly, and at the same time another man disappeared—a Jim Cartwright, not one

of the gang. What became of the girl I don't know, but I know what happened to Cartwright."

"What?"

"They had him put away, for a job he didn't do. I fancy he got too fond of the girl."

"Why shouldn't he?"

"They wanted that girl for something of the greatest importance. When she disappeared, I expected to hear of a big and clever coup, but nothing happened."

"You think they are still working it?"

"That is the point precisely. I am right off the trail. I can put my hand on Jim Cartwright, who is serving a sentence of five years under the name of Montgomery, but I don't think he knows anything. He seems to have been the poor dupe—a fly walking straight into the web of the spider."

"But what did they want with this fellow?"

"He is a clever draftsman and engineer. Any man like that is useful to the gang. But I imagine that his interest in the girl precipitated matters. They had him put where he couldn't interfere."

Inch's auditor nodded several times. He quite understood the inspector's impatience. For over five years Inch had been engaged in untangling this huge knot. Of every hundred crimes that took place in London, at least twenty per cent could be traced directly to the well-organized gang known as the Inner Circle. It was curious that in no single case had an arrested member betrayed this gang to the police. That mysterious person who was the vital spark of the machine held them all in the palm of his hand. They feared him as they never feared the police or the gloom of the jail.

"What's the next move?"

"Watchful waiting," replied Inch. "That's all there is left to me."

"You've never seen this Ciphero?"

"Never."

"He may be just a myth."

"Not much of a myth about him. Whatever he is, wherever he is, I credit him with the brain of a Napoleon. In five years I haven't got within a mile of him. If I could only find that girl——"

"How would she help you?"

"If she is innocent, as I believe, I could use her as a bait to draw Ciphero. But I fear she is by now a strand in the web that is being spun to catch some poor devil. I am certain that big things are afoot, and here are we drinking milk! It's maddening!"

While these two talked, one of the subjects of their conversation was finding health on the wind-swept tors of Dartmoor. Violet had carried out Cartwright's instructions implicitly, and for over a fortnight had been living in a farmhouse about two miles from the prison. The farmer was named Voysey and proved to be a good-natured soul, despite his rather desperate financial straits. It was this which had caused him to jump at the chance of taking a paying guest.

He worked his small holding with the help of a stalwart son who rejoiced in the name of Giles. When Violet had turned up, the pair of them had a shock. They had scarcely imagined that so wonderful a person should want to spend part of the winter on Dartmoor. In a few days they were at home with her, however, for Violet had the happy knack of gaining confidences, and both the farmers had plenty of confidences to impart.

It was her first visit to the West country, and she found it even more beautiful than she had supposed. Despite the immense quantity of rain and the howling northwesters, it was good to breathe the pure air and to know she was regaining her strength. Already her cheeks were blooming and her eyes were bright.

"You'm be doin' foine, missie," said Voysey. "Us allus do say there baint no air like that o' Dartymoor. They convicts away to Princetown ought to think theyselves roight lucky. I do say that nary a one of 'em works harder than me or Giles."

Mention of the great gray prison brought a flush to Violet's cheeks. Somewhere in there was Jim Cartwright, working out his time, hour by hour, day by day. How glad she was that she had come down to this place, so that letters could pass between them. She knew how welcome hers must be to him. Already three had changed hands. She tried to make them interesting to him, telling him in great detail of her daily walks, and of the things she saw.

Once she had even seen him for a second as his section was marching back to the prison after work was done at the quarry. Her heart ached as she gazed on the prison clothes and saw the warder with a rifle in his hands. Cartwright had seen her, too. She was aware of this and managed to catch his eye for a fleeting instant. Then he disappeared.

When alone with her thoughts, she became filled with a burning desire to set off on the warpath, with a view to proving Cartwright's innocence. It seemed too awful to sit doing nothing, when a man was suffering unjustly. Yet he had begged her not to do this, and without his consent she was reluctant to act. Then came the time when she was compelled to consider the future. It was obvious she could not continue being idle for long. Some kind of occupation was necessary. She decided to stay at the farm for two weeks more and then to seek employment locally.

In the meantime, something quite unexpected happened. The lusty, honest, toiling Giles fell in love with his father's beautiful guest. Violet tried to persuade herself that it was a mere fancy on her part, that the youth was not interested in her. As the days went by, however, his infatuation became more evident. Giles had the advantage of a better education than his father and did not indulge in the local dialect. She was deeply sorry for him, for he was only a lad, and she knew that this was his first affair of the heart.

"So you're going away soon, Miss Dixon?" he queried.

"Who said so?"

"Mother told me. I was hoping you wouldn't go just yet. You—you aren't tired of the moor?"

"I could never tire of it, Giles. I think it the most wonderful place in the world."

"But you're going, all the same?"

"Like you, I must work, Giles. Life cannot be all play."

"It can—for you—if——"

He checked his impetuous utterance as he realized that she did not welcome it. In one second he saw that his dream was smashed, and he turned his head away. After a brief hesitation, she put her hand on his arm. His miserable face came round.

"Giles, you were thinking impossible things, weren't you?"

"Yes—impossible. You see, it isn't every day that some one—like you—comes our way. There isn't much life on this side of the moor and I——" He shrugged his shoulders and laughed away his misery. "Can you forgive me?"

"There is nothing to forgive."

"I ought to have known there would be some one else."

"Some one else!"

He shut his mouth quickly as if he regretted this remark. There was something in his expression which made her suspect that he knew more than she had thought.

"I never—said there was," she murmured.

He said nothing for a few minutes. She realized that he was deliberately keeping something from her, and she grew a little afraid.

"You mustn't make guesses like that," she said.

"It—it wasn't a guess. I—I saw something away at the Parson Rock last week, when I was driving in the sheep. It was no affair of mine, and I didn't mean to look, but——"

She knew he was referring to the last letter she had secreted there. Her face went pale, and instantly he was sorry.

"I'm a meddlesome fool to have mentioned that."

"You saw me leave something?" she asked fearfully.

"Yes. I—I suppose it must be for some one you care about—some one who is—out yonder."

"Yes, Giles. Some one who is wrongly imprisoned."

"That is why you came to stay here?"

"Partly. But I was ill and wanted to get well again. Giles, you—you won't let any one know about that, will you?"

"I'll be hanged first!" he replied tensely. "If I can ever help you—or him—you only have to tell me how."

"Giles, you're a brick!"

After that, Violet felt easier in her mind. That Giles could be trusted she had not the slightest doubt. At the same time, she kept her own council with regard to the circumstances which had led to the present state of things.

A few nights later, a dreadful thing happened. She had been out all day on a walking tour and had come back feeling healthily tired. Voysey and his wife had gone to visit some relatives on the other side of the moor, and only Giles was at home. Being an excellent cook, he had prepared a good meal for her and kept it hot in the oven. She ate this with the greatest enjoyment and left her room to talk to Giles about various things connected with the farm, in which she was greatly interested.

He was narrating an incident of the preceding winter, when a bad snowstorm had been the cause of his losing three sheep and a cow. She was facing the window and interested in the story, when she had an uncanny feeling that caused her to shudder and lift her eyes. She uttered a little cry as she perceived at the window the hideous features of Ciphero. Instantly it vanished, and she was left to wonder whether it was some trick of the brain. Giles, much perturbed, came round the table.

"Are you ill?" he asked.

"No. I thought I saw something—a face—at the window. But of course it could not have been! Oh, don't worry!"

"Might have been some tramp, having a look in. I'd better go outside or we may lose some chickens."

He ran out of the door, but came back a few minutes later to inform her that no one was to be seen. She left him soon after and went to her room to think over what had happened. Something told her the face was real. The livid mask stood out clearly in the light of the lamp. What more likely than that Ciphero had succeeded in tracking her down and was now waiting his opportunity to capture her again?

Before she retired for the night, Violet wrote a letter to Jim Cartwright. It informed him that in the event of his getting it she would have been captured by the gang. Knowing the hold he had over the warder, she believed that in an emergency he would escape again and help her, as he had on the other occasion. How would he find her? That was a problem. It was extremely unlikely that in the event of capture they would take her to the same house again. She could not see how Cartwright could help her again—yet she felt he should know the danger that threatened. When she had put the note into an envelope, she saw Giles.

"Giles, will you do me a favor—in certain eventualities?"

"Of course."

"Here is a note to—to some one. If anything should happen to me——"

"Happen to you! I say, you aren't in danger, are you? That face you said you saw and——"

"There is danger," she confided, "but it is nothing against which you could protect me. I wouldn't have you mixed up in it. Giles, if ever I should—be missing take this note and put it into the crevice on the Parson Stone."

"But——"

"You said I could rely on your help. You can help me most this way."

"Very well," he muttered. "But I'd like to see any one attempt to harm you. Perhaps you are exaggerating things—getting a little nervous in this lonesome place."

"Perhaps," she replied with a wan smile. "But all the same I should like you to remember the letter."

Something happened that evening which put new courage in her. Two stranded motorists turned up an hour later and asked if it was possible to get a tow into the next village. The only horse the Voyseys had was far too small to do so; besides, it had been working hard all day. Voysey suggested that they should sleep in the farm that night, and he would ride to the next village and bring help early in the morning. The two men rather reluctantly agreed, and Giles went out to put a tarpaulin over the broken-down car.

Violet caught only a glimpse of the motorists. They were both inclined to take their troubles philosophically, despite the fact that they both had to sleep in one single bed. She heard them laughing long after she had retired and was glad they were in the house, for she feared the sinister face she had seen only a short time before.

Her dreams were of evil things, and she imagined she heard strange noises. For hours she forced herself to keep

awake, and she was mightily relieved when day broke. With a view to curing a bad headache, she went for a walk before breakfast. She had imagined that she was first up, but to her surprise she saw the two motorists tinkering about with a big car which was about a hundred yards from the house.

She was about to make a cut across the bracken, when one of the men approached her and raised his hat. He was the younger of the two and a happy-go-lucky kind of man. She halted and waited for him to come near her.

"Excuse me, but could you oblige me with such a thing as a hairpin?" he asked with a smile. "I promise to return it to you, none the worse for use."

She laughed and took a pin from her hair. He nodded appreciatively and put out his hand to take the article. Instead of taking it, however, his hand caught hers in a grip of iron. The next instant she was whirled off her feet and clasped in his arms. Simultaneously the man in the car started the engine. She screamed as she was carried swiftly across the intervening space, but her voice sounded feeble in the broad expanse. In two minutes she was in the back of the car, being held firmly by her captor. The engine roared, and the car slid forward.

"How dare you!" she gasped.

"Steady! You have nothing to fear."

"Who are you?"

The man shook his head and returned no answer. There was not the slightest doubt in her mind that she was in the hands of Ciphero's tools and that somewhere Ciphero was waiting like a horrible spider for his victim.

"You—you look a better man than some of the others. Won't you let me go?" she pleaded. "Haven't you done enough wrong already. In what way have I injured you——"

"S-sh!" he hissed. "Please understand that I am only obeying instructions. But I can tell you that things are not quite as bad as they look."

With that, she had to be satisfied. When the great awful prison disappeared over the horizon, however, she felt more afraid than ever. Giles would undoubtedly do his part, but would Jim Cartwright be able to escape again; if he did, was there the remotest chance of his finding her? She thought not, and she shuddered before the shadow of some terrible future as yet unknown.

CHAPTER XIII.

NEED FOR ACTION.

TO a certain extent, Jim Cartwright's life in prison was brightened by the secret letters he received from Violet. Nevertheless, he found the days long. He had managed to make a safe return and found Dawson, the warder, almost crazy with anxiety. The jailer's natural cupidity had not vanished with his position as a prison official and a crisp five-pound note was not refused.

"You placed me in a difficult hole," he said. "It was as much as I could do to carry it through."

"All's well that ends well," remarked Cartwright with a smile.

After that, he found that Dawson treated him with greater consideration and ascribed it to hopes on that worthy's part of another little present. From Violet's letters, Cartwright got to know where she was and what she was doing. Being so near her and yet so far from her was tantalizing. He could not help feeling that the danger was not permanently removed. If the gang wanted her as badly as they appeared to do, surely they would put their intricate machinery into operation to find her.

When the weather was exceptionally bad, the prisoners worked inside the prison, and the chance of a letter was canceled. Cartwright had an idea that Dawson knew of the existence of these missives, but if he did, he was content to wink an eye at it. From his attitude, Cartwright gathered that the jailer lived in mortal fear of being found out by the prison authorities. It strengthened the hold Cartwright had over him.

One day a new man was added to Cartwright's section. He was past fifty and a villainous-looking scoundrel. While working in the quarry, Cartwright noticed the brand of the circle on the man's forearm. There was another scar across it, as if an effort had been made to remove it. Cartwright managed to get into conversation with this man one day.

"What's your stretch, Denny?"

"Five of 'em."

"Same here. That's a queer scar you've got on your arm."

Denny looked at him from under bushy eyebrows, and then shot a furtive glance at the warder. "Ever seen it before?" he queried.

"Lots of times. You got mixed up with C?"

"A bit—long time ago. But what do you know about him?"

"Quite a lot. Did you ever work at Agnots?"

"Rather, and at the other place as well."

"What other place?"

"Quang's—in Limehouse. I got my first stretch through Quang. That was a big job!"

Cartwright was not interested in the particular job, but he was anxious to get any information he could concerning the gang, and he considered himself fortunate in running across this aged crook and apparently being mistaken for one of the same infamous crew. Denny, apart from giving away the locality of Quang's eating house, helped him very little.

"I've never seen the boss," Denny said. "And I never met a man who had. I'll tell you this, though. I believe he is above arrest—some one pretty high up in sassiety. Look at me—I'm in for five years. Why the Number One could get me out to-morrow, if he wanted to. I was a mug to chuck him and go off on my own. It's madness for a fellow to work on his own these days. There's that devil Inch prowling round every corner——"

"Inch!"

"C. I. D. chap. There's only one man alive who can beat him at the game, and that's Ciphero. When they meet, there'll be a funeral, and it won't be Ciphero's neither!"

Cartwright never had an opportunity of speaking to this crook again, for the next day Denny got in a fight with a warder and underwent solitary confinement and other discomforts. Nor was Cartwright greatly disappointed, for the beetle-browed ruffian was a repulsive person.

In the midst of Cartwright's misery and humiliation came a blow. The weather had changed for the better and work on government mail bags was substituted by quarrying. Wheeling a barrowload of rock from the quarry to the top of the rise, he halted near the improvised letter box and, glancing to see that Dawson was not looking his way, thrust his hand into the recess and uttered a little cry of joy to find a small folded piece of paper there. He put it inside his cap and returned to the barrow immediately.

Cartwright dared not open it until he returned to his cell. There he slipped it into a book, borrowed from the prison library, and pretending to read the volume, perused the beloved handwriting. The contents brought him up with a gasp.

> This evening I saw a face at the window. It was C's mask, and I was afraid. If this note should reach you, it will signify that they have got me again. I am giving it to Giles Voysey to leave at the usual place in case—— Giles can be trusted. But don't run grave risks on my behalf. I shall fight as long as I have breath.

That was all, but it was enough to cause his heart to beat like a steam hammer. It left Cartwright completely in the dark concerning the method of the kidnaping and the objective of the kidnapers. Since she had been snatched from the house near Hendon, it was inconceivable that they would take her there again. Where, then, could he search? Moreover, there was no date on the note. For all he knew it might have been in the recess for several days.

Cartwright planned his course of action in less than half an hour. Having succeeded once in getting away, he could see no good reason why it should not be repeated. The trouble was, however, that Dawson would not be able to get further leave unless he could put in some extraordinary excuse. That was Dawson's affair, though, and Dawson would have to solve it by his own wits. Cartwright rang the bell and the jailer appeared at the peephole.

"I want your help again," said Cartwright.

"What do you mean?" Dawson asked.

"I must leave the prison this evening. We'll have to change again."

Dawson's face went pale, and he shook

his head determinedly. "It could never succeed twice," he said hoarsely. "I tell you it would be discovered!"

"You'll have to risk that. I am desperate."

"So am I."

"Listen! Do this, and I'll swear I'll never ask you to take another risk. I'll give you twenty pounds when I return."

"But I'm due to relieve the other man to-morrow. I can't get leave suddenly."

"You'll have to, for I can't get back to-morrow.. I want a few days of freedom—a week perhaps."

"A week! It's impossible!" cried Dawson.

"Not if you use your wits. What will happen if you fail to report for duty to-morrow?"

"They'll send to my rooms to know what is the matter."

"Well, you'll have disappeared. You can make a sudden appearance in a week's time and plead that you lost your memory."

"Do you think the governor would swallow that?"

"He might give you the benefit of the doubt. Anyway, it's for you to manage that part. I tell you that I must be away this evening. I'll come back as soon as I can."

"Be reasonable," pleaded Dawson. "If it was discovered that——"

"That you are not what you pretend to be," interrupted Cartwright, "that you were implicated with Ginger in that Holborn robbery, that you have conspired with a convict and received a bribe——"

Dawson went green as he realized the strength of the prisoner's position. Undoubtedly he stood to be ruined if he refused to do this man's bidding, whereas the alternative certainly offered a chance of success. "If I do this—it's the last time," he murmured. "I wish I had never seen you!"

"I'll never ask another thing of you," promised Cartwright. "Come here as soon as you are ready. Is that same man on the gate?"

"Yes."

"Good! He is shortsighted. Don't forget the overcoat."

Dawson closed the peephole and went away. Cartwright paced up and down the cell nervously. Whatever happened, the escape must not fail. Even now he might be too late—it depended upon when that note was written. Later, Dawson slipped inside and the change of clothes was made.

Cartwright passed through the outer gate a quarter of an hour later. The doorkeeper seemed not in the least suspicious, but there were several other officers going off duty, and one of them shot a suspicious glance toward him. Cartwright made his way through the gate before any questions could be asked him, however.

It was a dark night, and the moor was desolate. Here and there were a few lights, and far away in the sky was the glow of a fair-sized city. Cartwright was on his way, pitting the strength of his arm and the keenness of his mind against the combined force of a gang of criminals. If he were recognized by a policeman, he would be arrested at once. He squared his jaw grimly and strode off into the night, to take up the search for Violet.

The succeeding chapters of this novel will appear in the next issue of TOP-NOTCH, dated and out April 15th. It began in the March 15th issue. Back numbers may be obtained from news dealers or the publishers.

Sharing the Novelty

BARELY had Mrs. Jamekins entered the taxicab and closed the door, when the engine started with a jerk, and the car moved off at a frantic speed, rushing madly along the road, narrowly missing street cars, trucks, policemen, and other obstacles lying in its course.

"Oh, driver, driver," shrieked Mrs. Jamekins, "please be careful! Please be careful, driver! Remember this is the first time I've ever ridden in a taxicab!"

"Oh, that's all right, ma'am," came the reassuring answer. "This is the first time I've ever driven one!"

Lots of Reasons

JOBSON: "You bought the stock on your broker's advice, didn't you?"

Dobson: "Yes; he gave me four excellent reasons why it should go up."

Jobson: "What has he to say now?"

Dobson: "He has given me four equally good reasons why it went down."

TOP-NOTCH TALK

News and Views by the Editor and Readers.

APRIL 1, 1924.

Little Things That Count

THERE is a very widespread idea among a large number of people that an editor knows everything. If any one wants to find out the names of the two pugilists who fought forty rounds in the open air in France and received nothing for their trouble, or desires to know the distance from the earth to Mars, he writes to the local newspaper editor and gets a correct reply. Now, there is probably no ordinary person who could give the answers to both these questions; a man interested in sport might know the first, and a professor of astronomy the second; yet the editor answers both. No wonder he gets the reputation of omniscience!

For our own part, we had an experience with the editor of a small-town newspaper many years ago which completely banished any idea we may have entertained up to that time as to the universal knowledge of editors in general. In the course of conversation, the subject of mules came up, and the local editor vigorously denied that a mule was a hybrid. Nothing we could say would convince him, and we were ingloriously defeated in the argument. We consoled ourselves, however, by reflecting that when he got back to the office and was surrounded with the infallible atmosphere of the editorial sanctum, he might, perhaps, take the time to refer to the dictionary and thereby learn that a mule is not a genus of its own. Had he been asked this question by one of his subscribers through the mail, he would have done this first. As it was, we got him at a disadvantage, separated from the sources of his knowledge.

Of course it is part of the business of an editor to know a great many things, and he usually does; but he cannot possibly know everything. Therefore, when a story contains technicalities of any trade or profession, he has to depend upon the reliability of the author, and we have found that TOP-NOTCH authors endeavor to have every detail correct. Accuracy is a thing that we insist upon, and no author can write for us if he does not pay attention to the little things that make a story ring true.

In the Next Issue

THE complete novel in the number that will come to you on April 15th is called "Threads of Destiny," and when we tell you that the author is Burt L. Standish we feel that we have said enough. We may add, however, that this is a story which will make a hit with all those who love the good old United States, and that's about all of us. There is a young man to whom America is simply a good place to come once a year to collect his income, and we leave you to guess what has to be done to him. It *is* done, thoroughly and permanently, and we are sure that you will find the doing of it an entertaining yarn.

The novelette will be a forest-ranger story by another TOP-NOTCH favorite, Harrison R. Howard. It is called "Gift of the Gale."

As the big-league baseball season opens on the 15th, we have provided a corking tale of the diamond by Howard Philip Rhoades. Mr. Rhoades has given us many good stories before, but we think that his latest tale, which he calls "Batter Up!" is the best piece of work he has done yet. Then you will get a navy boxing story by Frank Richardson Pierce, and he knows the navy inside out. His tale is entitled "F. O. B. Ship's Tackle." For good measure in the sport line you will find a story in which business and golf are nicely blended in the proper proportions. Frederick Walworth Brown is the author, and the story is called "The Boss and the Backspin."

The other short stories will be: "Masters of Cunning," by Harold de Polo; "Law of the Bush," by William M. Rouse; "Shoes and the Man," by Artemus Calloway; "No Time for Business!" by

Frederick Davis; and "Not an Easy Mark," by James Howard Hull.

The powerful serial by George Goodchild, "In the Clutch of the Circle," will be continued, and there will be the opening chapters of a new serial by William Wallace Cook, called "The Man Who Played Square." This is a strong tale of a Western gold mine, and we think it is one of the best stories Mr. Cook has ever written.

The poets will contribute the following: "When the Umpire Shouts 'Play Ball!'" by James Edward Hungerford; "April Whims," by Calvert McQuay; "The Only Way," by Clarence Mansfield Lindsay; and "Dream Makers," by Edgar Daniel Kramer.

Welcome News

Editor of Top-Notch Magazine.

Dear Sir: I happened to get a copy of Top-Notch yesterday, and I want to say that the stories have improved a hundred per cent. The last copy I bought was over a year ago. Your stories in this edition entitled "Only a Pair of Silvers" and "Behind the Bolted Door" are real.

I have been a reader of the publications of your firm the last twenty-five years, and after this I certainly will get Top-Notch. Your stories are clean, with a punch in them, and that is what the sleepy people in Philly like! We may be slow, but we know a little about good reading matter.

Give us some more stories like "Masks of Confusion." I sat up until midnight to read the magazine through. Hoping I have not taken up too much of your valuable time, I am, sincerely yours,

Robert H. Moss, Jr.

Lycoming Street, Philadelphia, Pa.

A Valuable Feature

Editor of Top-Notch Magazine.

Dear Sir: This letter is for the purpose of giving you my opinion of the two letters written by Allen Clark and Frank B. Wells printed in a recent issue of T.-N.

I am rather inclined to be like Mr. Wells. I like stories that take me far away from the regular routine of everyday life. But after all a little real life mixed with fiction is very acceptable to me. It seems to me that T.-N. stories are all flavored with real life which is very interesting. Both of the readers who wrote had good ideas.

I have read T-.N. for years, and have never found a story in it that was not moral. The stories of T.-N. make us look toward higher things of life. And its clean, pure stories make it a very worthy magazine.

The stories of January 15th issue were up to T.-N. standard in every particular. I have little or no criticism to offer on that issue. But will mention a few stories that were of especial interest to me. "The Seagoing Locomotive" was a dandy. "Never Fire First" and "That Talking Lake" were also good. But "Black Gold" has captured my interest, and I can hardly wait until the next part is out. It promises to be a real story.

I have never attempted to criticize your magazine in any way, but it seems that you are not giving us enough T.-N. Talk. Please, Mr. Editor, give us an extra page or two. I like to read the letters of the readers, and I think it is a valuable feature of your magazine.

Will close with the wish that you may continue to offer us readers the clean, entertaining stories like those of the past.

Sincerely an ardent admirer of a worthy magazine. Ellis B. Mosby.

Camden, Mo.

Top-hole Stories

Editor of Top-Notch Magazine.

Dear Sir: I have often wondered if you ever get letters from this side of the globe. I have been a reader of Top-Notch for some time now, and I feel I must write to you and congratulate you on the fine stories you publish. Although the Top-Notches I buy are generally a month or two old I always enjoy them. The last one I read was dated September 15, 1923. Invariably I commence at the first story and go right through the magazine before I lay it down. I often wish I could get the T.-N. as soon as it is published, so as to keep in line. I enjoy stories by Mr. Standish very much, also stories of the Mounted Police are top hole.

I wonder if, through the medium of your Top-Notch Talk, I could get in touch with some of your readers. I would like to correspond with some one who hasn't been to England; and as I haven't been to America I am sure we could find plenty to write about. I am in the early twenties and fond of sport, especially motor-car racing and aviation.

I close now with hearty good wishes to you and your magazine and readers. Yours truly, T. A. Gibson.

Douglas Street, Derby, England.



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MORE light for all the dark places of your house. Instant light. Safe light. Keep a flashlight in each of those much-used closets. Tie tapes around them. Hang them where they will be instantly convenient. Don't stumble! Have another at the top of those dark cellar stairs. Don't fumble! Have another at your bedside for sudden needs at night.

Keep them loaded with Eveready Unit Cells and you will have plenty of bright, white light where and when you need it.

If you have a flashlight not in use, get it out and reload it with Eveready Unit Cells; long-lived cartridges of brilliant light. Buy them from any electrical or hardware dealer, drug, sporting goods or general store, garage or auto accessory shop.

When you buy new flashlights, be sure they have EVEREADY stamped on the end. EVEREADY means the highest standard of flashlight quality, and Eveready Unit Cells give more light longer. Prices from 65c to $4.50 complete with battery—anywhere in the U. S. A.

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The Simple Art of *Getting* Well and *Keeping* Well



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There is nothing mysterious about its action. It is not a "cure-all," not a medicine in any sense. But when the body is choked with the poisons of constipation —or when its vitality is low so that skin, stomach, and general health are affected—this simple, natural food achieves literally amazing results.

Concentrated in every cake of Fleischmann's Yeast are millions of tiny yeast-plants, alive and active. At once they go to work —invigorating the whole system, clearing the skin, aiding digestion, strengthening the intestinal muscles and making them healthy and active. *Health is yours once more.*

"I am office manager for a large mercantile corporation. Two years ago I began to develop 'nerves,' stomach trouble, insomnia, and worst of all to me, an irritable disposition towards those under me. Chatting with a friend I spoke of always feeling so rotten that life was hardly worth living. My friend urged me to try Fleischmann's Yeast, attributing his own excellent health to its daily use. At the end of a week I was eating it with a relish, and feeling a great deal improved. Now a day never passes that I don't eat at least three cakes—using them as a between-meal snack—with the result that I am in the best of health with an eager zest for my work."

(Extract from letter of Mr. G. A. Dempsey of Winnipeg, Canada)







"I watched her crumble the crisp cake into the milk. We drifted into conversation. She sang of the magic of Fleischmann's Yeast. Many months before, her doctor had recommended it and she confessed she owed the clearness of her complexion to its use.

"I was persuaded to try the yeast in milk, and prepared to swallow an obnoxious dose. I was pleasantly surprised. It proved a delightfully palatable drink.

"Fleischmann's Yeast waged a successful battle against the canker sores, dried up the existing ones and cured the stomach condition which was causing them. I faced my winter's work with enthusiasm, and came through triumphant."

(Extract from a letter of Miss Grace S. Baumann of Philadelphia)



"I knew my headaches and unwholesome complexion were caused by constipation. To take frequent cathartics was my regular program and even by doing this I was tired and dopey. 'I like what yeast does for me' said one of my customers and asked if I had ever tried it. I acted on this suggestion and began to drink yeast in milk regularly. Soon people began to comment on how well I was looking—my husband said I grew younger—the mirror told me my complexion and eyes were clear and bright. Cathartics are now a thing of the past."

(A letter from Mrs. Mabelle Conomikes of Marathon, N. Y.

Dissolve one cake in a glass of water (just hot enough to drink)

—before breakfast and at bedtime. Fleischmann's Yeast, when taken this way, is especially effective in overcoming or preventing constipation.

Or eat 2 or 3 cakes a day—spread on bread or crackers—dissolved in fruit juices or milk—or eat it plain. Fleischmann's Yeast comes only in the tin foil package—it cannot be purchased in tablet form. *All grocers have it.* Start eating it today! A few days' supply will keep fresh in *your* ice box as well as in the grocer's. Write for further information or let us send you a free copy of our latest booklet on Yeast for Health. Address: Health Research Dept. Z-3, The Fleischmann Company, 701 Washington Street, New York City.





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To guard against substitution, be sure you ask for it by its full name—***James' Temple of Allah Incense.*** *Remember, only* ***James' Temple of Allah Incense*** *guarantees you fullest satisfaction for all uses, so insist on getting the original.*

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James' Temple of Allah Incense is made of the highest quality East Indian Sandalwood, Rose Petals and Florentine Orris-Root, in both powder and cones, in five enchanting fragrances: Sandalwood, Rose, Wistaria, Pine-Needle and Lavender.

*Leading drug and department stores carry **James' Temple of Allah Incense,** but if unobtainable from your dealer, order direct. 1¼ ounce box of powder, 35 cents. Special De Luxe Incense Set—all-metal Oriental burner and package of incense, attractively boxed—$1.00. Sent postpaid anywhere in the U. S. A.*

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Top-Notch Announces the Winners of the January 1st

Advertising Prize Contest

First Prize:	$15.00.	J. C. Nattrass, 1101 Elk St., Bellingham, Wash. *For letter submitted on Hupmobile.*
Second Prize:	5.00.	Mrs. O. B. Smith, 34th St., Catlettsburg, Ky. *For letter submitted on Fatima Cigarettes.*
Third Prize:	3.00.	John J. Driscoll, Verplanck, New York. *For letter submitted on Spiegel, May, Stern Co.*
Fourth Prize:	2.00.	Dr. E. Delbert Jones, Chandlers Valley, Pa. *For letter submitted on Ivory Soap.*

We want to thank our readers for the many letters we have received. Our readers were quick to respond to our invitation to write us and help us prove to the advertiser that readers of fiction magazines read the advertising pages. The many letters received prove that our contention has been correct—that readers of fiction magazines *do* read the advertisements and the advertising department is glad to say that more advertisers are being convinced of this each month. Renewed thanks to our kind readers who have helped and are helping us.

Winners for the February 1st issue will be announced in the May 1st issue

See regular contest page for April contest

Choose the keyboard yourself

Something new in typewriters ---- an "individualized" keyboard to fit your work exactly. Mail the coupon! Get all the facts about this remarkable machine. Learn how easy it is to own one



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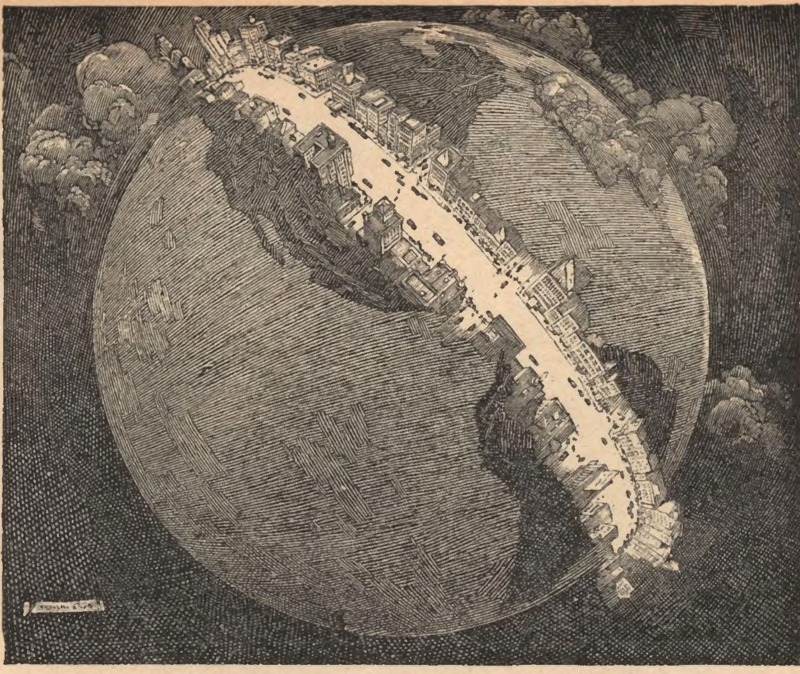
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